



This is a digital copy of a book that was preserved for generations on library shelves before it was carefully scanned by Google as part of a project to make the world's books discoverable online.

It has survived long enough for the copyright to expire and the book to enter the public domain. A public domain book is one that was never subject to copyright or whose legal copyright term has expired. Whether a book is in the public domain may vary country to country. Public domain books are our gateways to the past, representing a wealth of history, culture and knowledge that's often difficult to discover.

Marks, notations and other marginalia present in the original volume will appear in this file - a reminder of this book's long journey from the publisher to a library and finally to you.

### Usage guidelines

Google is proud to partner with libraries to digitize public domain materials and make them widely accessible. Public domain books belong to the public and we are merely their custodians. Nevertheless, this work is expensive, so in order to keep providing this resource, we have taken steps to prevent abuse by commercial parties, including placing technical restrictions on automated querying.

We also ask that you:

- + *Make non-commercial use of the files* We designed Google Book Search for use by individuals, and we request that you use these files for personal, non-commercial purposes.
- + *Refrain from automated querying* Do not send automated queries of any sort to Google's system: If you are conducting research on machine translation, optical character recognition or other areas where access to a large amount of text is helpful, please contact us. We encourage the use of public domain materials for these purposes and may be able to help.
- + *Maintain attribution* The Google "watermark" you see on each file is essential for informing people about this project and helping them find additional materials through Google Book Search. Please do not remove it.
- + *Keep it legal* Whatever your use, remember that you are responsible for ensuring that what you are doing is legal. Do not assume that just because we believe a book is in the public domain for users in the United States, that the work is also in the public domain for users in other countries. Whether a book is still in copyright varies from country to country, and we can't offer guidance on whether any specific use of any specific book is allowed. Please do not assume that a book's appearance in Google Book Search means it can be used in any manner anywhere in the world. Copyright infringement liability can be quite severe.

### About Google Book Search

Google's mission is to organize the world's information and to make it universally accessible and useful. Google Book Search helps readers discover the world's books while helping authors and publishers reach new audiences. You can search through the full text of this book on the web at <http://books.google.com/>

NYPL RESEARCH LIBRARIES



3 3433 07484184 6



NBO  
Berry





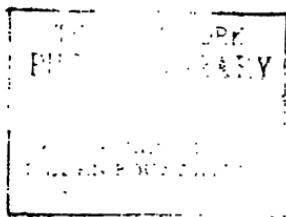


# A WOMAN OF UNCERTAIN AGE

NBC

1000

1  
2  
3  
4  
5





"DON'T BE FRIGHTENED," HE WHISPERED, "I'LL FIRST SAY  
YOU'RE MY WIFE." —*Page 98*

# A WOMAN OF UNCERTAIN AGE

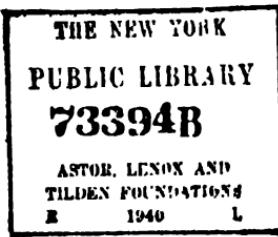
BY

MARY ANNE BERRY



NEW YORK  
THE STUYVESANT PRESS

1909



Copyright, 1909, by  
**THE STUYVESANT PRESS**

*Registered at Stationers' Hall, London*  
*(All Rights Reserved)*

Printed in the United States of America



**I DEDICATE  
THIS ROMANCE TO THE MAN  
WHO CAN INSPIRE SUCH A LOVE**

***M. A. B.***



# A WOMAN OF UNCERTAIN AGE

---

## CHAPTER I

THE New York-Newport colony has become so mixed that it is impossible to longer maintain the rigid lines originally drawn by Ward McAllister, limiting the charmed set to four hundred.

Mrs. Livingston, a widow of enormous wealth, one of the most conservative members, has dared to limit her circle to about fifty families. She has always enjoyed the prestige and authority which her position commanded and might have succeeded to the royal mantle of society leader but for her fatal defect of ultra-exclusiveness.

Therefore, it is only natural that her niece, Isabelle Stewart, should succeed to the throne, being a woman of unique type with unusual charm and

## A WOMAN OF UNCERTAIN AGE

---

beauty, and with great wit. She had not craved success, yet she had achieved it. While little more than a girl she had married Captain Thomas Malcolm Stewart, of the United States Navy, who had inherited great wealth.

He had long been considered a confirmed old bachelor. Captain Stewart was a very indulgent husband, and he had provided his wife with an unlimited income, which enabled her to maintain one of the largest houses in New York, a cottage at Newport and an ocean-going yacht.

The Livingston villa was especially large, stately and expensive, as are all houses at Newport, illustrating the most luxurious way of living that America has yet attained.

Mrs. Livingston, rather a ponderous, well-preserved-looking person, came into the loggia; she was followed by a chauffeur, a magnificent specimen of young manhood.

He had a physique such as nature gives to a fighter or to a man born in obscurity whose fate



## A WOMAN OF UNCERTAIN AGE

---

it will be to struggle upward with the eyes of the world upon him. The strong shoulders rising above the proud chest were in keeping with the development of the whole frame. He had heavy brown hair which was inclined to curl, and in his blue eyes shone a light of absorbing love. And there was an unmistakable air of superiority about him that every one felt. When he had deposited the wraps on the table:

"Can I do anything more for you, ma'am?"

"No, Canning, thank you very much. It was good of you to pick me up. I hope my own car is not going to be laid up. I think you had better hurry back to my niece now. I am afraid she will be angry if she finds the machine gone. She doesn't like to be kept waiting, and her temper seems easily disturbed of late."

The chauffeur smiled and bowed. As he left the loggia, the man servant instinctively held the curtain aside for him as he passed through the door, then hated himself for the action.

## A WOMAN OF UNCERTAIN AGE

---

As the maid was removing her mistress's hat, the latter inquired:

"Is my niece down yet?"

"Yes, madame. Mrs. McCarter has gone to the meet hours ago."

"What! Following the hounds and I haven't had time to inspect her? How did she look, Marie? Country?"

"Oh, no, madame, quite correct."

"Yes, she always could ride well. That was all she could do. You may go now. Send Mrs. McCarter here when she returns."

"Yes, madame."

Mrs. Livingston leaned back in her chair. She felt tired and was glad she had been picked up by her niece's man. She reflected that she had been overdoing of late and that if she kept up this pace she would certainly grow old. The time of life she had come to was horrid. She called it the pepper and salt stage—the age when a woman's back hair does not match her front hair.

## A WOMAN OF UNCERTAIN AGE

---

Men called it “fetching”—the sort of men who say they love a pug-nose unless they are talking to a woman with a Grecian nose—and she thanked heaven they were all liars. What should we do if they told us the truth?

She didn’t believe she wanted to grow young again. Youth and folly have such a shocking habit of going hand-in-hand; yet she was not prepared to say she had had enough of youth, but she had had her share of life’s follies. She felt herself sorely in need of serious counsel. Instead, she must now pose as the woman who had left personal interests far behind and was compelled to figure in the career of her young niece, whom she was to teach the art of fascination, of making her seductive and enforcing adoration; but what was so tiresome about herself was, as her face grew older her heart grew younger. All the blows which she had sustained during her earthly pilgrimage had left her power of credulity unimpaired. Her thoughts were interrupted by her maid.

## A WOMAN OF UNCERTAIN AGE

---

"Mrs. Stewart is here, madame, and wants to know if you will see her so early in the morning."

Mrs. Stewart had closely followed the maid.

She was a tall, magnificent creature, brimming over with unusual physical health and vigor, attractive for the grace which combines the ease of indolence with vivacity, and strength with extreme freedom.

"Good-morning, Aunt Livingston, how do you do? How are *you* this morning? Oh, don't kiss me, because I am an inch thick with powder. Oh, it's invisible, but the slightest touch disturbs it—'taints the bloom,' to be poetical. I suppose you are amazed to see me at this unearthly hour."

"Unearthly hour, indeed! Why, my dear Isabelle, it is half-past eleven."

"Breakfast-time for me usually. But you see there was a public rehearsal of some Frenchman's symphony at the Casino this morning, some decayed count, I believe, who has grabbed Newport as a last resort, just as a dying man would a straw, and, of course, I had to put in my appearance."

## A WOMAN OF UNCERTAIN AGE

---

"Oh, you're a member of the orchestra?"

"A member of the orchestra! Now, you're guying me, Aunt. Don't you know it's quite the proper thing to attend all such affairs at the Casino? All women of note go. This morning we all arrived in a bunch about half-past ten, just as they were playing the most delicate *andante*, you know. We sat down and chatted and laughed and made all sorts of plans for the afternoon and evening, and then they struck up a triumphant march as we all got up and left, feeling we had done our duty by the indignant nobleman. And, what do you think, Aunt? Helen Horton came in her riding-habit. She had been out with the hounds and looked perfectly charming, and when it was over she mounted and rode away. A tremendous success. But I should dearly like to know who suggested the idea to her. It certainly never originated in her brain unassisted."

She stopped a moment, breathless, and then went on:

## A WOMAN OF UNCERTAIN AGE

---

"Can't you give me a bit of wine and biscuit, Aunt? I am nearly famished, and I must fly home and change my dress for Mrs. Jenning's luncheon. Are you going to it?"

"No. I have sent my regrets. I have a more important engagement."

Mrs. Livingston looked curiously under her niece's hat, then exclaimed:

"I say, I do like your new hair, Isabelle; it matches your freckles so well."

"Oh, do you, really? Well, I am glad somebody likes it. Of course, you know it is the color of late suppers and divorces."

"Great heavens!"

"Why, yes, of course; in some cases the dye comes first, then the divorce. In others, the divorce leaves the coast clear for the dye."

"Oh, but you are not going to have a divorce, Isabelle?"

"Oh, dear, no, of course not. It isn't at all necessary. I never see my husband as it is, and

## A WOMAN OF UNCERTAIN AGE

---

he wouldn't see the color of my hair, anyway. He is blind when he looks at me."

"My! what a convenient husband—away for two years and blind for the rest of the time."

"Oh, I don't know. I don't think it nice to be so much alone; it isn't good for a woman."

"Why, my dear, what a strange humor you are in this morning. What ails you? Haven't you heard from your husband lately?"

Mrs. Stewart arose angrily, stamping her foot.

"Did you say husband, Aunt? I tell you I have no husband. Tom doesn't count. What's the good of a husband who is a sailor and lives principally at sea? How can one believe in a husband one never sees? For me, I tell you, Tom doesn't exist, and I fear some day, in a fit of absence of mind, I will marry somebody else. I tell you, Aunt, I am hungry for love."

Her aunt simply gazed at her horrified, while Mrs. Stewart resumed:

"Oh, I know it doesn't sound well in public, but that is the word, all right—hungry."

## A WOMAN OF UNCERTAIN AGE

---

"Hungry for love? That is a dangerous frame of mind, dear. There are plenty of unscrupulous men who would be interested to know it and quite willing to profit by it. And your one fault is lack of reserve. Now, don't be vexed with me, my dear, but few men are to be trusted. I know your position is a hard one, being alone so much."

"Yes, and I feel sometimes that I simply must have a nice man to advise me. Do you know, I have the most heavenly idea of friendship. Only men don't like it. They either make love to me or call on me once in three weeks and talk politics. I want a man to run errands for me, to take me to the play, to save me trouble at every turn, and to dote on me discreetly. But I find that if they dote they are not discreet, and if they are discreet, they don't dote. Now, isn't it discouraging?"

"How about your old friend, Lord Anthony? You must have been treating him badly."

"Ugh! Lord Anthony, he's disappointed me too, the silly old goose!"

## A WOMAN OF UNCERTAIN AGE

---

"Isabelle, you don't mean it? Not that dear old Irish gentleman?"

"Oh, yes, I do; he's worse than some of the others. He dotes, but isn't discreet, the old idiot. He's the kind of man who would persuade a woman to elope with him and then forget to meet her at the train. No one understands me, not even my husband. I wrote him all about dyeing my hair, sent him a lock of it, and told him I was hungry for love. He said he would have to leave the navy and come home to look after me; that it was common and low for a respectable woman of my age to dye her hair. He said I should realize that he would love me whether my hair was gray or not; that I would always be his darling Isabelle, the only woman he had ever loved. Oh, such tommyrot! He doesn't understand that I am doing all this to make myself attractive for him. What a waste of time—for such a man! All my married life I have been going about starving my soul. He has never given me what I need most.

## A WOMAN OF UNCERTAIN AGE

---

Sometimes I feel I am dangerous, even to myself, Auntie, but what can I do? A woman is only a woman—and she can only love one man at a time."

"Yes, and a husband should see that *he* is the man. But you have your children, Isabelle——"

"Children, children—that's it—children! That's the rivet that holds the chain, but what woman with heart and imagination does not crave the thousand touches of cherishing tenderness which a man who loves her alone can give? Can I discuss the problem of my soul with my babies? I can't spend all my evenings hearing my children's prayers. I have plenty of time to listen to love. Any human woman must and will be loved by some one."

"But you are too reasonable and well-balanced a woman to let such things trouble you. Why don't you tell Tom—explain?"

"What! Confess to my husband? Oh, Aunt, never! The woman who would lay her soul bare to a man has lost her hold on him forever. My

## A WOMAN OF UNCERTAIN AGE

---

very honesty would be my ruin. It is his duty to find it out."

"But Tom is so good and so gentle, my dear. I am sure he would not hurt you for the world, if he knew."

"Yes, gentle and good. Oh, I hate gentleness and goodness! I wish he were a wild Irishman—anything but what he is."

"There, my dear. Don't let us talk any more about this. You are nervous this morning, and you won't be able to go to the luncheon. Besides, I have a little surprise for you."

"Really, what is it—a new cook?"

"No. Cousin Elvina is here."

"Elvina McCarter in Newport? Since when had quite forgotten she was on earth."

"Yes, she came last night, with horses, dogs and three servants."

"And pray, what brings her here?"

"Oh, to see something of the world and learn to be fascinating."

## A WOMAN OF UNCERTAIN AGE

---

"Good gracious! And hasn't she found that out at her age? Poor Elvina! she always was slow. However, I shall be delighted to see her, and I think I could give her some advice on the subject, if she wants it. I have learned my lesson fairly well."

"Take care, my dear; you'll frighten her to death. She is just as she always was. Innocent, timid and devilish—rather paradoxical, don't you think?"

"Then widowhood hasn't changed her?"

"No; no more than marriage did. If you recall old Colonel McCarter you can guess——"

"Little Elvina, I dare say, hasn't lost flesh grieving for him. I do hope she will marry a nice young man next time. Heaven! what would I've done if I had been compelled to marry such a fossil? Fortunately, her husband had the good taste to expire after one year of ennui, but the country house in old Virginia continued to imprison its captive, and the timid widow remained there dur-

## A WOMAN OF UNCERTAIN AGE

---

ing the term of mourning. Oh, immaculate lamb ! But with whom is she in love now ? Do you know, Aunt?"

"Yes. I saw there was something on her mind as soon as she arrived. Of course, I questioned her, and the poor child no doubt felt thankful for my sympathy and, in a burst of confidence and tears, acknowledged that she had fallen desperately in love with young Lieutenant Coles, of the navy, whom she has only met a few times."

"The match doesn't seem to be a difficult one to arrange. Elvina is young and pretty and vivacious, or she was a few years ago."

"Yes, she is still pretty, if not prettier. She smiles now. Widowhood has granted her a glimmer of hope, poor dear."

"Well, she is rich enough, too. Why doesn't the Lieutenant marry her?"

"She fancies she doesn't please him."

"And, pray, why not? Tell me all about it, Auntie."

## A WOMAN OF UNCERTAIN AGE

---

"Oh, the child has an idea that her general appearance, her ignorance and prejudice against the ways of the world, have impressed him unfavorably."

"Oh, I am sure all that is easily repaired. How soon is she likely to see him again?"

"He has been in Newport for a week. I believe he intends to call this evening."

"Good! then we must make haste. There isn't a moment to be lost. She must first have a lesson in fascination. I will help her dress, do her hair, and give her a bit of style, and I will stake my life that the gallant Lieutenant will never recognize her when I am through."

"I will go and see if she has returned, but I must be present at the lesson. Who knows but what I may learn something, even at my age?"

The yelping of dogs and tramping of horses' feet announced her return, and Mrs. McCarter rode up to the loggia, accompanied by her cousin Jack, who assisted her to dismount. She rushed

## A WOMAN OF UNCERTAIN AGE

---

up the steps and greeted Mrs. Stewart, who held her at arm's length.

"Oh, you little darling! Be careful of my powder, honey. My! but I am delighted to see you here."

"I ran away this morning before Aunt was up. I felt I must have my morning gallop."

"You certainly look stunning in riding-togs. But how much you have gone through! Aunt Livingston has told me all."

"All—all?"

"Yes, every tiny little bit; but I think you exaggerate your troubles, my dear."

"But . . . but . . . he doesn't love me, Isabelle."

"How do you know he doesn't?"

"He can't love me—just look at me. What a difference between you and me! If I were only like you, Isabelle, if I could only acquire your graces, your charm!"

The Woman wished in her heart that she could

## A WOMAN OF UNCERTAIN AGE

---

exchange places with the girlish figure beside her, but merely said:

"It isn't impossible. Listen to me. I'm going to help you. I am going to take you to Mrs. Jennings's luncheon to-day. It's only a woman's luncheon, a function which ruins the digestion of all women present and the reputation of those who are absent. Oh, but you are too unsophisticated to know how bad it is."

"Oh, I'm delighted. I'm just dying to go to a real Newport luncheon; and is it a real, typical Newport villa?"

"Quite, my dear, in looks—it overlooks the sea and it is the most beautiful thing of the kind I have ever seen. White inside and out—everything white —except its owner. It goes by the name of the White Sepulchre, and, indeed, in one sense it is a mausoleum where many nice, robust reputations are bleaching."

"And Mrs. Jennings is young and beautiful?"

"Oh, of course, beautiful. She has large green

## A WOMAN OF UNCERTAIN AGE

---

eyes—not young exactly. She is fifty, but looks thirty. Oh, how I hate a woman who can look like that. It's so deceitful. But no one grows old nowadays. It's freedom that keeps one young. Husbands are very wearing on one's nerves. She is a widow, a real widow like you, my dear. I am practically a widow, too, though my husband comes back occasionally."

"I hope mine won't."

Mrs. Stewart laughed bitterly.

"You'll be an apt pupil, I am sure. Come, and I'll teach you the folly that you want to know. I'll take you into the emptiness and glitter of this world in which we live, and maybe," she said with a sigh, "you'll find a greater happiness in it than I have."

## CHAPTER II

THE Woman lay back in the cushions of a marble bench in graceful exhaustion. Her indolent limbs crossed, her unstudied pose, the utter lassitude of her movements, all suggested one to whom life has lost all its present interests—a woman who had known the bliss of love only in dreams, a woman bowed down by something. One had but to watch the tossing of her proud head, and the ever varying turns and curves of her throat, to be able to understand the deep-rooted passion in the nature of this woman, which seemed bound to influence her whole life.

She got up with a sigh and started to enter the house. Suddenly she was confronted by Lord Anthony, a tall, distinguished-looking, rather elderly man with red hair, a big nose and a broiled-lobster complexion. He was in riding-togs. She

## A WOMAN OF UNCERTAIN AGE

---

showed him plainly that she was not pleased, because she knew it was his intention to declare his love for her. She felt it. He had been trying for some time to do it, but she had always succeeded in preventing him. This morning it might be different. She was in such a strange mood. He had told her a score of times, or she had a score of times read the secret in his eyes. The attention of this man had at first promised to amuse her and to give her a greater interest in her lonely life. He had been a sort of plaything for her caprice; he was so strong and intense and even violent at times, and she liked the violence in him; and in return Lord Anthony cherished many sweet memories of little attentions she had bestowed on him. He imagined that a romance was growing during every moment he spent with her. It was, however, a romance that was controlled entirely by the will of this woman. If sentiment grew too fast she would quarrel with him, and it was so easy to quarrel with him because he was Irish.

## A WOMAN OF UNCERTAIN AGE

---

There was one thing he was sure of—she had shown him a certain preference. He took both her hands in his now and looked wistfully into her eyes. "Good-morning, my dear Mrs. Stewart. I rode over to see how you were this morning. I missed you at the dinner dance last night."

"Oh, did you really? I feel very well this morning, thank you, Lord Anthony."

"Well, you don't look it. I believe I see tears in your blue eyes, my dear Isabelle."

"Haven't I told you not to call me by my Christian name? You don't see anything of the kind."

Tossing her head defiantly she made a motion as if to leave the loggia, but Lord Anthony stationed himself in front of her.

"Don't go! Stay and let us talk."

The Woman came back half reluctantly and seated herself by the table. Lord Anthony sat opposite her.

"You should not be unwilling to spend a few moments with a sympathetic friend, who would

## A WOMAN OF UNCERTAIN AGE

---

love to spend hours with you. I would spend my life with you."

The Woman rapped on the table violently.

"There you go again. I shall go right into the house if you don't stop. It seems that there can be no friendship between us. It must either be passionate love or utter indifference."

"But why will you continue to refuse to let love give all that it has taken from you? Your life is really only beginning. Won't you trust yourself to my care? It is good to be loved."

"I am too old," she said wearily. "I must continue to suffer as in the past. One must love, did you say? Yes, I know, I feel that way sometimes, but I must not. I can not, Lord Anthony. Your friendship adds a great sweetness to my life, but you should not try to make me believe that you, a man of your age, have never loved. It's a man's great pretension with us. We always believe it—out of pure politeness. Show me the man that has had only one opportunity of losing his heart. You

## A WOMAN OF UNCERTAIN AGE

---

men all love to deceive us, and we submit to the deception. One must be loved, did you say? Yes, I know, but I must not—the price is too great."

He sought her hand to kiss, and she gave it to him. This woman's hand had a fragrance that sent a thrill from his lips to his heart.

"Won't you always give it to me like this?"

"Yes, but it must stop there. Lord Anthony, I want you to know that I accept you as a friend, not as a lover. I wish I knew you had the instincts, the delicacy of real friendship, so that I might lose neither your respect nor the pleasure your friendship gives me."

Her words sent a shock to his heart.

"Then, am I to expect only friendship, after all these happy hours you have given me? I sleep and wake with you in my heart; and you wish me to believe a woman of your passionate nature is to know nothing of love?"

"You forget, Lord Anthony, that I am married—very much married. My way of living has

## A WOMAN OF UNCERTAIN AGE

---

given me the liberty to bestow my attention and perhaps—my heart; but the law and custom leave me no right to dispose of my soul. If a woman loses her honor, she is an outcast in any rank of life, and I have yet to meet the man to whom I would sacrifice it. You are really very nice, and I want you as my friend, if you won't make love to me. Do you think it possible to find happiness outside the limits which the law of society has, rightfully or wrongfully, set up for us to live by? Even if one's life has been full of bitter disappointment and neglect, do you believe there could possibly be a tie of real happiness between two human beings held apart by any social law?"

"I think love has its instincts, finding a way for everything if the feeling is sincere. Love's destiny is never doubtful."

"Do you think it is possible for a woman—be she wife or mother—to be secure from the attentions of men?"

"No, of course not, not if she is very lovely, and

## A WOMAN OF UNCERTAIN AGE

---

if she has been very much neglected by her husband. But one thing is sure: she could refuse to see the man just as soon as she learned the secret which she is sure to guess."

"Yes, I know, but if it seemed too decided a step to take, and especially if she does care just a little and her own yoke has become so tiresome. Ah, there it is. Nature is always setting before us some vague image of bliss, bidding us either enjoy a wrongful happiness or lament it when it has fled. Lord Anthony, do you know, I believe you inspire all the devilish nature in me this morning, but I like it—or rather, I don't know what I like this morning. Life must be easy for you men because the world expects so little of you."

"Oh, most men have a few virtues besides the negative one of not being blackguards. Don't you believe that we too have our struggles? We work out a line of conduct for ourselves and try, with tears and prayers, to stick to it. Men and women are much alike, only you are more complex. As

## A WOMAN OF UNCERTAIN AGE

---

for me, Isabelle, I love you. I have loved you with a love that has grown with my life, and I have wanted you for my very own. Is it not happiness that counts more than all else? Surely a woman who has been so neglected should have one more chance."

The Woman was silent. She had risen and taken up her coat.

Lord Anthony took the coat from her hands and put it on her tenderly. The action brought him too close for his own strength. He folded her fiercely in his arms and kissed her neck and hair. At that moment the curtain was lifted aside, revealing an elderly, dignified man, wearing the uniform of a naval captain. His face was white with suppressed fury at the sight which confronted him.

"And so you are here with your lover?"

The Woman gasped.

"Good heavens, Tom! where did you come from?" Trembling, but not faltering, she went on: "Oh, *he*? He's not my lover."

## A WOMAN OF UNCERTAIN AGE

---

"That is for him to explain."

"Oh, Tom! Tom! it is horrible. Lord Anthony, I implore you to go."

"I will, if you wish it," said Lord Anthony; "but I will not go far, and I will come back when you want me."

"My business is with her. There is time enough to settle with you, Anthony," said Captain Stewart.

Then he turned to his wife. "What have you to say for yourself? How long have you been deceiving me with this Irish scoundrel?"

The Woman grew whiter, but answered with great firmness: "I have never deceived you; you have always neglected me. You have left me alone for months and years—with only my babies to comfort me. I have wearied you. I have been going about all my married life starving for your love and caresses. If I ever got them, I had to parade myself before you and ask for them. Lord Anthony is a good and honest man in his love, and he has a decent heart. He has offered me his

## A WOMAN OF UNCERTAIN AGE

---

love, title, fortune and everything, but I don't want them—I tell you I wouldn't have them."

"It is my right."

"It is not; you have long lost it by your shameful neglect. But don't be afraid. I haven't accepted Lord Anthony. I want the love that is mine by right, not a substitute."

He flushed red, and a vein stood out on his forehead.

"A likely explanation. Does a decent woman let a man take her in his arms and kiss her? Do you ask me to believe that? You are low and vile. Stay here; I would not soil my hands on either of you. There is a better way to punish you—both."

He started to rush from the loggia, but the Woman caught him with a low cry: "Oh, Tom! Tom! you cannot—you must not believe that. You must *not* go."

She threw her arms around his neck. "Come back and sit down quietly, and we will talk . . . once more."

## A WOMAN OF UNCERTAIN AGE

---

He sat down in the chair she motioned him to, and she threw herself back against the cushions on the bench. For a moment she looked at him as he beat the floor with his foot. Her face was full of courage and affection.

"Really, really, Tom, I'm ashamed of you. Were there ever two people so absolutely unsuited for one another as we are?"

"Never mind that now, Isabelle. Tell me why did that man kiss you?"

"Well, the principal reason was because I couldn't prevent him; but that kiss meant nothing to me—absolutely nothing. Listen to me, Tom, I am horribly disappointed in you. It's nothing to inspire an ordinary love. Most women are only pegs on which to hang passion, and not its real cause. But I always flattered myself that I inspired in you a love that was worth more, although it seems that only unhappiness and anxiety have come of it. I have loved you and have tried in every possible way to keep your love, to make you

## A WOMAN OF UNCERTAIN AGE

---

believe that I was not an ordinary woman. I have exerted myself all our married life to adorn myself to please you, to prove to you that you were the man of all the world I loved. I have even assumed caprices when I really hadn't them, because I thought you liked these moods in me; and I have been foolish enough to think you understood me."

"And so I have always believed, but this which I have just seen is a new phase. My deep-rooted love has stood the test of many years of married life and your many little follies. It has been proof against almost everything. You know you have always been able to rule my heart. You know you could raise a storm there or still it with a glance."

"Yes; but when the real test comes you act like any other man, and I believed you wholly incapable of such folly and such lack of faith."

"You couldn't expect me to act otherwise. assure you I acted mildly enough."

"But that moment was the most important one

## A WOMAN OF UNCERTAIN AGE

---

of all my life. You may regard it as the least important, as the most frivolous, but I feel I am no longer your wife, mistress or bond servant. You have neglected me and have had no faith in me. And so the liberty that I have assumed, through *your* fault, has corrupted our union. I have given this man a right, a liberty to enter into the sanctuary of my home and thoughts. I have put myself at his mercy. I bid him enter. Is it an offense, or is it only the first step toward offense? Anyway, I have accepted it with its consequences, paying dearly for my foolish pastime—for my plaything of an hour."

"Then Lord Anthony was not altogether to blame? You invited him—you encouraged him?"

"Oh, dear, no, of course he wasn't to blame. I did it all, though he didn't need coaxing; he is such a silly old fossil, so willing and always ready."

"I can understand how he could, but you—*you!*"

"Yes, that's it. I am only human, after all, and I had to have some entertainment while you

## A WOMAN OF UNCERTAIN AGE

---

were away. I found life so empty. Tom, you must know my whole life with you has been a disappointment from beginning to end."

Here she broke down and wept a little; then, hurriedly drying her eyes, she said:

"No, I won't cry, because you once called me a booby for crying."

"It was unkind of me to say such a thing."

"No; my tears are only appreciated by my babies. They alone love me and hate to see me weep. My blessed children, they have been my nearest approach to real happiness, but they, too, may disappoint me. You husbands are the cause of all our unhappiness. We marry you because we love you, we give you our virgin youth and love, and we are happy with you for a while, and we might continue forever if you desired it so."

"I am sorry, Isabelle, that I have been such a disappointment to you."

He gathered her in his arms and kissed her as though he would like to reknit and reconstruct the tie that seemed so nearly broken. The Woman

## A WOMAN OF UNCERTAIN AGE

---

stayed quite passive in his embrace, simply enduring it, apparently too much hurt or exhausted for response.

"Oh, you are sorry for us—that's it. I tell you we don't want pity, we want your love. There are men who are never so happy as when they have lost their wives' love, and are playing the part of martyred husbands. They always get so much sympathy from their friends. Men cannot understand why—even the wisest and very best husbands often never even guess why—their wives are cold and indifferent. Maybe they are tired of running after you and parading themselves before you, asking for what you should give without the asking. Yes, you have a wife to whom you have given everything, as you say; a beautiful home, a good position in life, everything any woman could wish for, and still she is not satisfied."

"Well, what more could any man do for a woman than this?"

"Oh, fools, fools, if you would only give us a

## A WOMAN OF UNCERTAIN AGE

---

little more of yourselves we wouldn't need so many other things. If you would give us a little love, and a little more attention and companionship, you would find yourselves well repaid. Is it not as delightful to love your wife as to love some other woman?"

"We do love our wives; it is our greatest and our best love that we give them."

"Oh, I don't know about that. Anyway, it isn't a happy love, and certainly you don't make the effort to keep them, and it is happiness that counts with us. The trouble is, you are married to the one woman. Consequently, you believe she belongs to you—body and soul. Of course, you are sure your wife is a well-bred woman with brains, and you could never be entirely wretched with a woman like this. You are always sure of her to a certain extent; she may have her faults, but you are never afraid of her. You know she will never make you wholly contemptible, that she will always be wife and mother and do the correct thing for her home and children, if the test comes."

## A WOMAN OF UNCERTAIN AGE

---

"To be sure, a man expects all this of his wife. Why shouldn't he?"

"Why should he? Why expect more of her than he gives? There are wives who would make their husbands very happy if they were given a chance. But you are careless of us, you spend too much time at your business, at your clubs with your men friends—or with some other woman."

"You know there has never been any other woman with me."

"Oh, I am not so sure about that. I've had my suspicions."

"And why, pray?"

"From some leaves I found in an old diary of yours."

She opened her gold card-case and removed a few small leaves pinned together.

"See, I have always kept them here, and they have caused me many tempers. I hated them, still I cherished them. Would you like me to read them to you?"

## A WOMAN OF UNCERTAIN AGE

---

The husband seemed a little ill at ease. After a moment's hesitation, he answered:

"Why, certainly, my dear. I'm not ashamed of anything I have written in my diary. You don't mind if I smoke, Isabelle?"

"Oh, dear, no. I'm rather inclined to a cigarette myself."

"You don't mean to say you smoke?"

"Why not?"

"Why, I rather thought that my wife——"

"Oh, that's an exploded idea. Tobacco quiets the nerves, doesn't it? And in this practically widowed life I've been living my nerves have needed quieting just as much as yours."

Extending the cigarette-case to her, he inquired:

"May I light it for you?"

"Thank you, don't bother. I can light it myself."

She threw herself back among the pillows and puffed caressingly at the cigarette. Her husband watched her, plainly annoyed, and thinking that

## A WOMAN OF UNCERTAIN AGE

---

she did it rather awkwardly for one accustomed to smoking.

"I wish you would give me a little seltzer, Tom. There is some on the table yonder."

As Captain Stewart walked over to the table, the Woman threw the cigarette away and wiped her mouth hurriedly.

"Shall I put a little lemon in it?"

"No; just a touch of brandy, if you please."

"Brandy?"

"Yes, brandy. Only a tiny bit, just a suspicion."

"I don't like to see you taking stimulants or smoking cigarettes, Isabelle."

"Very disagreeable, isn't it; but, of course, I only take them medicinally—merely to restore wasted tissues. You shouldn't have left me alone so long; you don't know what all I've been doing since you've been gone. But what on earth do you expect me to do? You know this lonely life here in the country bores me to death."

"Yet you used to love it once."

## A WOMAN OF UNCERTAIN AGE

---

"Yes, there were lots of things I used to love in my unsophisticated youth, when I didn't know any better."

"The instincts of youth are sometimes truer than the wisdom of age."

"Oh, yes, sometimes, but not always."

"When we were first married, you implored me to buy a home in the country, where you could raise your children with more freedom. You were so proud of them and so proud of your horses, your dogs, your flowers, and thought no exercise equal to a morning gallop."

"Quite true, my dear husband, when we were first married; but, you see, the influence you exercised changed the harmony. You were so much older than I; you had, in fact, lived three times as many years. I was a girl—a mere child; you were a man of the world."

"True, Isabelle; but let us talk—don't let us lecture."

"Talk—about what? I am afraid you and I

## A WOMAN OF UNCERTAIN AGE

---

have not many subjects in common. Our talk always ends in argument, or rather falls into argument and ends in personalities."

"But can't we find some subject which is not likely to lead to disagreement? Surely, living as we do, so much apart, it seems we ought to find something agreeable to say to each other."

"Let us change the subject and go back to the diary. If I have sneered at all that is good and honest in our common nature, if I take stimulants and smoke cigarettes, whose fault is it? It isn't mine."

"You are mistress of yourself."

"No; I am no longer mistress of myself."

"I am grieved to hear that you have alienated yourself from all that was once an admirable wife and mother."

"You misunderstand me. When once the quiet happiness of a woman's home and her confidence in her husband are lost, and the woman is left alone for weeks and months, what can she do? She must

## A WOMAN OF UNCERTAIN AGE

---

have some little excitement in the world. She must forget what has been lost in the pursuit of pleasure. No, the fault is not mine altogether. Now, have we not had enough of this life, you and I? Are you not sick, as I am weary, of wearing this domestic mask?"

"Isabelle, what do you mean?"

"I mean we have acted our parts long and well. Let's give up this deception, which does not deceive. Let us be candid with one another."

"Isabelle, you don't mean——"

"Oh, yes, I do; just as plainly as I can speak it. I say that for both of us our marriage was a mistake. Our years of experience have taught us to know our natures. Let us face the situation, recognize this life as intolerable, and—part."

"Part, Isabelle?"

"Of course. Why should we endure a companionship that has become a mutual slavery?"

"Part?"

"What difficulty is there? Doubtless, society

## A WOMAN OF UNCERTAIN AGE

---

has long since noticed and remarked that we are not at all suited to each other. There will be no surprise if henceforth our lives are separated formally, as they have long been in reality."

"Formally separated—you and I? Do you mean it? Do you know what you are saying?"

"Unhappily, I do. For a long time these words have weighed heavily upon my heart."

"And you would leave me and the children? What of them? Oh, you don't mean it. You don't mean it, Isabelle. I can't spare you—I love you too well."

"Love me! Love! You love yourself, you mean—love your ease, your comfort, your position. Love me, indeed!"

"I could not bear to lose you."

"You should have thought of that before you left me for months and years, before you allowed your daily life to show me how little you really cared for me and your home and your children. It is too late now."

## A WOMAN OF UNCERTAIN AGE

---

Slowly she unpinned the leaves of the diary, which she had held in her hand, and read:

“ ‘I have secured a palace for the queen of my heart. I am happy every hour I spend with her. I have always been thirsty for just such a passionate woman, and this young thing has fulfilled my long unsatisfied thirst. I drink of her love with happiness and delight. I leave her alone for long intervals, but I never feel the least danger in doing so. She spends all her time in dreaming of my return.’ ”

He interrupted her:

“Isabelle, for God’s sake, stop! I swear that is not from any diary of mine.”

He tried to snatch the leaves from her, but she put them out of his reach.

“Oh, yes; but I know it is. Now, read this one, and then tell me if it is not from your diary.”

She handed him another leaf, which he glanced

## A WOMAN OF UNCERTAIN AGE

---

over hurriedly, his face plainly showing his emotions, as he read:

" 'I go on a long cruise. I have been drunk on the intoxicating passion and life with this woman. When I kissed her good-by this morning I held her in a long embrace. I shall remember that kiss to my dying day. She was happier than usual, and she whispered in my ear that she was *enceinte*. She was happy because of this, but it has spoiled it all for me. I have plenty of such responsibilities at home. I have loved her for her passion and her kisses. Now I must break away from this. She shall have all the doctors in Italy, but not me. I think I shall go home and see Isabelle and the children. I believe I love my wife best, after all. . . .'"

An awkward silence followed. Finally the Woman's rage, so long held in check, overpowered her.

## A WOMAN OF UNCERTAIN AGE

---

"Am I not right? Are not wives only for convenience, after all? What do we wives know of love? Nothing, because we belong to you. We appeal to you merely as a child would, to whom you give a sugar-plum for the sake of peace. When you feel your love for us failing, you admit the fact without shame or remorse, and you proceed to follow your inclinations and passions. Your wife may have just the temperament you require; yet you never know it. *You* are privileged because you are a man; a woman is only a woman. Your wife requires too much; yes, too much to make her contented. She wants extravagant clothes, horses and carriages, motor cars, a house on Fifth Avenue, and a country place, all because she is your wife; and still, still she is not satisfied."

The look on the husband's face was a strange one. It was a mixture of all emotions combined. In a soft, well controlled voice, he said:

"Yes, I give my wife all these things because she is my wife, and because I love her."

## A WOMAN OF UNCERTAIN AGE

---

The Woman's temper leaped up. Her heart was burning with wounded pride.

"Oh, do you, indeed? But not without many complaints, not without telling her she is the most extravagant woman you know. Yet to the other woman you give all this and more, if you have it to give, and without a single murmur of regret. But the other woman has the divine gift—she knows how to love you, and you make her life a joy. To please her is the one aim of your thoughts, and you live an enchanted life with her, wholly absorbed in your secret passion. Your wife may have all that your mistress has a thousand times over, but you haven't troubled to find out. Perhaps, however, some other man has taken the trouble to find out, and he will enjoy all the bliss you have carelessly lost. When you are married you seem to think you have got to the summit of happiness; but, my dear husband, the game of love has really only just begun. Falling in love and winning me may have been a difficult task; to keep

## A WOMAN OF UNCERTAIN AGE

---

me you will find a still harder one. Don't think this is a threat, my dear Tom. It is simply a fact."

"Or a warning?"

"As you like. I know you for what you are. I am not blind to your virtues, yet I am not content. You love me with a quiet, passionless love that lasts; but that's just it—it's too quiet and too passionless. It would satisfy some women, but it is not what I want—not what I need. I want a great, a strong, and a passionate love."

"My dear wife, you are going mad over this silly business."

"I hope not. Anyway, I shall not go mad before I have found all that my starving soul requires, and when I have I will satisfy my nature; I will dare anything. I, too, must live my life."

She hesitated and looked at him inquiringly, as though she feared that her next words might wound him too deeply.

"That is, if I ever do find a man to whom I feel I can give myself completely—the man who would love me as I wish to be loved."

## A WOMAN OF UNCERTAIN AGE

---

"You will find him. The world is full of just such men."

"I don't think the world is so full of them, and I am hard to please. I will not love easily, but absolutely—and I shall love without marriage."

"Isabelle, will you control yourself? This is odious to me from your lips."

"Don't be shocked, Tom. I must be frank with you. I must tell somebody, and I'm not afraid to tell you anything after reading your diary."

"I am glad I have your confidence, at least."

"Tom, I have tried marriage with all its security and its calm, and I am sick to death of it. This life is ruining my health and disposition. Of course, my disposition wasn't much to begin with. Understand me, I have loved you and have wanted you more than any woman ever wanted her own husband. Don't tell me a man with your experience with women does not understand. Surely, you must know that a woman of my temperament requires companionship and love—all that I never get."

## A WOMAN OF UNCERTAIN AGE

---

"Will you stop, Isabelle? You have just said that I have given you everything, everything any woman could wish."

"Yes, of course, that's it. You have given me everything, all the good things of life—everything but that which my soul needs most. I tell you I am sick and tired of being practically a widow; I tell you I cannot and will not live this life. If I ever find my ideal I am going to follow the inclinations of my soul, and no bond will be needed. That love will be strong and absolute. It will not become like ours, weak and strained, until at last it falls to pieces. I may suffer for living and loving in another than the right way—the conventional way society and the world have decreed—but I have lived too long in this conventional way. I have suffered and starved my soul. When I find the right man I am going to live and love, indeed, and suffer, maybe; but I prefer suffering to the wretched dream-life I have lived with you."

She laughed hysterically.

## A WOMAN OF UNCERTAIN AGE

---

"But, Tom, don't believe it's poor, dear old Lord Anthony. Oh, dear, no! He is too much like you. He has known too much of life already."

Lying back in the cushions, she half closed her eyes.

"I will try and picture to you my ideal. First, he must be young, but not too young; just old enough to have had some experience with women, otherwise he would not appreciate me. He must be tall and handsome, with blue eyes. He must be brown-tanned from being too much in the sun, too much out-of-doors——"

"He must be, in short, a robust beast?"

"Oh, nothing of the sort, though he must have a strong physique, with strong, brown hands, arms brown to the elbows, and a brown neck. Yes, a darling brown neck, and brown, curly hair, a little bleached by being too much in the sun. He must be full of courage and romance, not fearing to do or dare anything for the woman he loves. And when I find him I shall enter into a sublime and

## A WOMAN OF UNCERTAIN AGE

---

holy life of loving. It will be the union of two souls. I may be deceived and disappointed and it may make me unhappy, but I will be wholly to blame and I will be willing to pay the penalty of my own great fault. But I will have been loved and been happy, and that will be enough."

For a time the husband sat with his head bowed on his hands. Then, suddenly, he stood erect and with pale face gazed at the Woman in silence. He blushed at the thought of so frail a creature as this woman having exercised such power over him. She was only a child in years and experience compared to him, a man of iron, accustomed to command others, to see a whole ship's crew obey at a word from his lips. This woman before him, whom he could crush in his hands if he chose, lay there dreaming and picturing to him —her own husband, the father of her children—the lover whom she hoped to find. He was tempted for the moment to strangle her, to drag her from the bench and trample on her, to force her to shriek

## A WOMAN OF UNCERTAIN AGE

---

for mercy and implore his forgiveness; but instead he was forced to look within himself, to scrutinize his own deficiencies. This woman, by her very audacity, had won his respect and pity.

"Yes, Isabelle, I know, I understand perfectly. I wish I might change myself to the man of your ideal. It is a great pity, but I have not the power to make myself over. 'Ah, but I wish to God I had!'"

The Woman looked at him with an expression of lingering regret.

"I have told you everything, and I feel better. Now, you won't be foolish about Lord Anthony? Please ask his pardon and be friends again. Poor, silly old man, he only kissed me on my hair and neck. That really wasn't anything, and he has tried to do it so long, and then he was caught in the very act."

She laughed half hysterically.

"Go in and tell him you understand. Then forget it all and come home with me and see the children."

## A WOMAN OF UNCERTAIN AGE

---

He leaned over her for a few moments, his eyes resting earnestly upon her.

"It is all my fault," he said. "I should have been more careful of you. I should have held you with a stronger hand, or, better still, I never should have married you. I have always feared your nature would burst out like this, but, my dear, I do love you."

She met his cry in silence.

"I would willingly devote all the rest of my life to making you happy. I would make every effort to keep your love that other men make in trying to get it."

Then kissing her tenderly, he went into the house saying: "I will kick that damned Irish scoundrel, and if he ever dares enter my house again I will kill him."

## CHAPTER III

THE Woman lay back in the cushions very quietly for a few moments.

"Poor, dear Tom!" she sighed. "All this for just one little kiss on my hair and neck. It wasn't worth it. But they both showed the right spirit. My dear, good husband—truly I am sorry and not a little ashamed of having told him all this. But it is too late now. My soul has been too long starved. How little he knows me—to think I would let a kiss stop on my neck, if it had been the man of my soul! . . . ."

Turning her face away, she buried it in the cushions and lay quite still. Her motor car had come up the drive and stopped at the steps unheard. The chauffeur lifted her little son out of the seat beside him. The child clung to him in a playful way and, climbing on his back, clasped his arms

## A WOMAN OF UNCERTAIN AGE

---

around his neck and insisted upon being carried in. They came up in the loggia unseen and unheard by the Woman. Seeing his mother on the bench, her face buried in the cushions, the child thought her asleep. He slipped down to the floor, tiptoed around the bench, and whispered to the chauffeur:

"Now, you tell her first; you tell her for me, Canning."

Canning laid his cap on the table, moved forward slightly, then paused and shook his head at the child.

"Oh, yes, please do, that's a good Canning." Then: "I'll love you lots."

Canning again shook his head, and the child whispered:

"I will buy you a big, big box of cigarettes if you do."

Suddenly the Woman felt the presence of some one and sat up, startled. Her manner softened when she saw who it was. The man before her

## A WOMAN OF UNCERTAIN AGE

---

was young, strong, and seemed so sure of himself. She had always liked to look at him. He was so full of a certain dignity, yet without boldness. In fact, he seemed a little shy, sometimes too shy—the kind of nature that an unexpected suggestion might alarm, that would fly even from happiness. He seemed especially good to look at this morning, brimming over as he was with delightful youth and vigor. His presence had always given her emotions unknown before, and she had not been strong enough to fight them down.

"Oh, it's you, Canning. How you startled me!"

The young man's frank and steady gaze met hers.

"What is it? Why do you stand there looking at me like that? Has anything happened?"

"I beg pardon, ma'am. I am sorry to have disturbed you. No, nothing has happened, only Master Tommy, the little beggar, has been fighting again."

She appeared greatly relieved, and, throwing

## A WOMAN OF UNCERTAIN AGE

---

herself back on the cushions again, she absorbed every detail of the young man who stood before her without awkwardness, without weakness or cowardice. He met her gaze gravely, yet with an unmistakable touch of arrogance. She was strangely fascinated by him.

Just then the child popped up from behind the bench.

"Boo! boo! sweetheart mother!"

He was a sturdy little fellow of about eight years, with a heavy crop of beautiful red-golden hair. His legs were bare, and he wore a little white suit, the blouse of which was so long as to almost hide his little puffs of trousers. He planted himself in front of his mother, with his legs wide apart and his hands in his pockets.

"Well, sweetheart mother, what do you think? I licked John Harrison."

Throwing his arms around his mother's neck, kissing and hugging her, he pleaded:

"Now, don't be cross. I just had to do it, and I licked him good, too."

## A WOMAN OF UNCERTAIN AGE

---

"My blessed son, what did John do to you? You know mother doesn't want you to fight, darling." Holding the boy's face close to her own, she said: "Tell me, son, why did you fight him?"

"Well, mother, I just asked him if he knew what people said when they wanted to marry anybody, and John laughed at me, the silly kid! Then I licked him. Tell me, mother, what did father say to you? I am going to say just what father said."

"To whom are you going to say it, my son?"

"Why, to Jamie, of course."

His eyes met hers in frank surprise, as though he were astonished she did not already know.

"I want to ask her to marry me some day, and I don't know just what to say. Canning told me what to say, but I didn't much like what he told me. Now, you tell me, mother, just what father said. Then I will be sure I am right."

She hugged the child tighter in her arms, and looked at the Boy who was watching, apparently much amused.

## A WOMAN OF UNCERTAIN AGE

---

"This is a problem, my son, that every man has to work out for himself. If I were you, I should just tell her plainly that you love her with all your heart and soul, and that you must have her above everything else on earth. Say it simply and like a little man, so that she can make no mistake. You must make her feel that the strength of your love, whatever your position in life, was worth more than all else on earth."

"Oh, but I don't think, mother, I could ever remember all that. I guess I will just tell her what Canning told me, that I love her and when I grow to be a big man and have a good position in life, and lots of money, I want to marry her. Don't you think that will do?"

"Yes, my darling; that's it exactly. Only why say position? Love makes all things equal, and if she really loves you she will understand."

The chauffeur had fallen to dreaming. Suddenly remembering his position, he turned and left the loggia, going back to the machine. The

## A WOMAN OF UNCERTAIN AGE

---

Woman watched him until he was quite out of sight. Then putting the child down, she told him his father was home.

"He is in there," she said, pointing to the door.  
"Go in and tell him the car is waiting."

The child fairly danced with joy and ran into the house.

The Woman's blood tingled, her cheeks glowed, she suddenly drew herself up to her full height. Tossing her head in a defiant manner, she took up the leaves of the diary that lay beside her on the bench and pinned them together again. She was moving things about on the table, looking for her card-case, when she saw the little brown cap of the chauffeur. The odor of cigarettes that greeted her gave her nerves a shock, and instantly her mood changed. She turned the cap over, raised it to her nostrils and sniffed at it.

"What a strange, foolish thing!" she thought.  
"How weak of me to allow my soul to be thrilled by the odor of cigarettes! But this fills me with

## A WOMAN OF UNCERTAIN AGE

---

a whole world of delightful emotions—a whole lifetime of love. My ennui and this depressing morning are almost forgotten now. A new happiness seems to take up its abode in my heart. It is no use any longer to deny that this boy, this plebeian, this lackey, has caused me emotions I have never before felt. I have tried to believe it to be all wrong, yet a glance from him fills my life with joy for a whole day; and I was just beginning to feel my lonely life less.

"Can it be that this boy is to become the lover?"

Her hands trembled, her blood surged through her veins, as she pressed the little brown cap to her lips. Then she asked herself the same question she had asked many times during the past months: "Shall I? Dare I? Shall I spurn a peaceful and devoted love for this savage passion that has so completely taken possession of me? This passion that is so blind? The sin might blast my life, but I wouldn't care. If it will not hurt my children, I would willingly suffer a lifetime for just a little of the bliss of loving."

## CHAPTER IV

FROM that day the relations between Captain Stewart and his wife changed entirely; outwardly, however, they continued the same. The Captain's sudden and unexpected arrival home had caused no end of gossip.

His friends claimed that it was due to poor health; others said it was because he wanted to be near his wife, of whom he was believed to be very jealous. In reality, his sudden fits of jealousy had become more and more frequent, and it was not until this last outburst that he realized how much he loved this woman, who had always been such a source of anxiety to him. He had pleaded for her forgiveness, but she could not efface his terrible words from her mind, and the two continued to drift farther apart.

The Woman's health appeared to decline daily

## A WOMAN OF UNCERTAIN AGE

---

since her husband's return. Perhaps it was only indifference. If it was really ill health, it was graceful. The malady seemed little more than languor, but her physician had ordered her to keep to her room and have complete rest, and for this she was grateful.

Unhappiness, like great happiness, induces a life of dreams, and so she dreamed all day and all night. At times she determined to have happiness at any cost, but more often she lay a powerless victim of her indescribable longings. She spent most of her time in the nursery with her children, and in her boudoir, where she seemed happier. She had always loved her boudoir, which was in Louis XV style, with walls paneled in pink brocaded silk, outlined with ivory and gold. Dainty lace curtains, overhung with pink silk draperies, softened the light from the long French windows. The portraits of two beautiful children adorned the wall—one of a small boy with reddish-golden hair, sparkling eyes and laughing mouth; the other

## A WOMAN OF UNCERTAIN AGE

---

of a girl with the same features, but a few years older. It was here that she was accustomed to receive her most intimate friends—here that she had been most happy and most miserable.

The adjoining sleeping apartment was separated from the boudoir by silken portières, and contained two ivory and gold beds, one larger and one smaller one in which her little son slept. The beds were also draped with pink silk and lace and stood on a dais. Everything in the rooms, even the dressing-table accessories, revealed the personality of the Woman. There were innumerable individual touches which combined to create a harmony defining her character.

She loved her apartments more than ever now. A great change had come over her. Something sweet and lovely had suddenly stolen into her life. Was it love or was it passion? It did not matter to her so long as it made her happy. Her soul at last cried out: "I love you, I am yours." She was frightened at the thought that she, of all wom-

## A WOMAN OF UNCERTAIN AGE

---

en, might utter these words in vain, but she stifled her fears. She was happy, very happy.

She decided to surrender herself entirely, though she really wanted to yield inch by inch; but she feared her weakness. She was too impatient, too eager for love and caresses; her soul had been too long starved.

All women desire to love with a maiden soul, and when it is theirs no longer their hypocrisy is a tribute with which they welcome love.

Slowly but surely her passion for the Boy had entered into her whole being. She was thrilled by his every look, his slightest touch, and it was unlike anything she had ever felt before. At first it had alarmed her, for she knew what it meant. This new-born love filled her soul with doubts and fears, but such passion as hers acknowledged no past and feared no future.

The Boy had brought before her as realities all the problems of passion with which her mind had played so long. There was an indefinable har-

## A WOMAN OF UNCERTAIN AGE

---

mony between them. She saw unmistakable indications of intellect about him; he more than pleased her—he had become the symbol of all her desires; he was not only her ideal, but a living romance.

How was she to deal with such a problem—this woman who had always been proof against temptations? She had known them all, but would have none of them.

She lived wholly in her emotions, though she endeavored to make herself believe that it would never do to let this mad passion master her. Her pride would at times come to her rescue, and she would feel able to conquer her desire. Then she would set earnestly about this tremendous task, brooding over every thought with regret, full of vague longings as dreadful as remorse. But the effort was futile. She was so absorbed by this passion that everything apart from it, even her children, annoyed her. Her life seemed intolerable. . . . }

It was not until after months and months of

## A WOMAN OF UNCERTAIN AGE

---

battling with herself, not until her nervous system was almost wrecked, that she decided it to be shame that kept her from the Boy. But why should she be ashamed of her love for this clean and wholesome man? Was it not the most womanly thing about her? Had she not always lived in an atmosphere of repression, ashamed of everything that was real?

She knew, of course, that her world would be outraged. But she had had her fill of it. She knew that there is little in life that is real, and was it not the more commonplace things alone that give us the most lasting pleasure? To appreciate and accept this fact thoroughly, however, one must have been reared in luxury. This woman, who had had lavished upon her all that wealth could command, realized how empty and unreal life could be. She felt it would be an absolute delight to take the Boy to her heart and prove to him and the world how much she loved him. She longed to give him all the luxuries of life, of which



## A WOMAN OF UNCERTAIN AGE

---

she was weary almost to death, to see him enjoy all the things for which his young, romantic heart must long.

She believed he was all her soul desired, and she was willing to sacrifice anything and everything. She was ready to throw aside every trace of reserve, all chance of tranquil happiness, if she could only be satisfied that he would not be disappointing to her. It seemed a most delicate and difficult task. Should he prove to be all her soul had dreamed of, she would be happy. At all events, she would be wretched if she continued to live under this nervous strain. Yet, she asked herself, could there be any true and lasting happiness in an affair with the Boy?

She watched him now with the greatest interest, criticizing his every movement, and not one displeased her. She could not look at him with his unmistakable superiority of manner, without feeling it to be a pity that he had not been born to a better position in life.

## A WOMAN OF UNCERTAIN AGE

---

She had observed, with much satisfaction, that his leisure time was spent in reading and in outdoor sports. Despite his humble position, she believed he could never have been taken for other than a gentleman; his every act made her feel that profoundly.

Once she ventured to ask him of his past experiences. His eyes laughed back at her with a sort of dare-devil love of the life he was leading, as he answered:

"Oh, this is only one phase of my life—a mere beginning."

His answer piqued her curiosity. She resolved she would insist upon his telling her something of himself at the first opportunity that presented itself. Just how she was to accomplish this she did not know, for he was averse to talking about himself; but she was determined to know something of what his life had been.

One morning shortly after, when out motoring, they had a blow-out. The Boy halted just a

## A WOMAN OF UNCERTAIN AGE

---

little off the avenue, and after inspecting what the Woman felt to be a "delightful disaster" of the morning, he took off his coat and threw it over the back of his seat, then got out the jack and necessary tools for repairing the damage.

Oh! The odor of the destructive, sweet cigarette, mingled with that of a well-groomed man, gave the Woman a sort of sickening, frightened feeling, but she loved it. She leaned forward and laid her face on the coat. "Aimez-moi! Aimez-moi!" she whispered. The odor filled her very soul, filling her with a world of delightful dreams and imagination. She had always been rather susceptible to the odor of his cigarette, but this morning it was something more. She felt it to be a determining influence of her life.

Smoke, smoke, his delicious smoke! It seemed to be always clinging to her. Everything he touched in the car, its curtains, and even the very carpet seemed to be impregnated with it. It was like a greeting from him whenever she got into

## A WOMAN OF UNCERTAIN AGE

---

the limousine. Sometimes she wondered if he smoked inside the car. Had he guessed that she loved his smoke? She felt she would hate him if he dared to guess it.

She watched him with a commingling of every emotion, as he struggled with the new, stiff shoe, and she thought he was not altogether patient at the drudgery.

His sleeves were rolled up to his elbows, revealing his splendidly browned arms. As she watched the fluttering of his negligee shirt across his superb back and shoulders, this woman to whom effusiveness was easy in this delicious hour, believed the Boy before her gifted with every qualification that she required in her ideal. For the moment passion wanted to throw off its swaddling-clothes and feel the inexplicable pleasures that she had known only in dreams. She had lost all consciousness of time, and when at last the difficult feat of putting on the shoe was accomplished, she felt not a little sorry.

## A WOMAN OF UNCERTAIN AGE

---

He smiled up at her, saying:

"It isn't every man that can smile when he puts on a shoe like that."

"It was a hard one, wasn't it?" she replied.  
Then smiling back at him, she said:

"Come, Canning, get in your seat. You are no longer on duty. I want to talk to you. Do you know, I think you are a most unusual sort of boy?"

He laughed heartily, revealing his beautiful, well-cared for teeth. After brushing the dust and powder from his breeches, he flung himself into his coat and obediently got into his seat.

"Why do you always call me a boy? I am a man, and I have lived twice as much as most men of my age."

"Oh, very well, then, you are a man. Now, tell me something about yourself, your home and your mother, and why you came over here."

"My home is the world; my mother's memory"—instinctively his voice softened—"is my sanctuary, and her influence, I hope, will continue to guide me until we meet again."

## A WOMAN OF UNCERTAIN AGE

---

Taking a miniature from his pocket, he handed it to the Woman, saying:

"This is my mother's picture; she is dead. She was the one and only person who ever understood me; she trusted me and loved me—absolutely for myself."

The Woman experienced a quick thrill of deep respect for him.

"She was a dear little mother, I am sure," she said softly.

As she handed him the case, she noticed on the back the picture of a small boy, with big, blue eyes shaded by curly lashes, and long brown curls resting on his shoulders.

"Oh, what a lovely child!" she exclaimed. "Isn't he a little darling?"

"That was me when I was a kid. I don't look there as though I would ever rough it through life, do I?"

"And have you roughed it much—have you met with many hardships, endured much poverty? Tell me, Canning; I am much interested."

## A WOMAN OF UNCERTAIN AGE

---

He hesitated a little before answering, as he thought what his life had been.

"Are you, really? That is good of you, ma'am."

He was again as one who serves.

She regretted that he had taken on this well-trained servant's manner of speech. She had forgotten for the time that he was her chauffeur, and she wanted to tell him never to say "ma'am" to her again, but contented herself with merely repeating the question:

"Why did you come over here?"

"I left England because I desired with every fiber in my being to—" Then suddenly he became conscious of the trend of his words, and concluded—"to make this my home. I have had many experiences here. I have not had luxury. I have worked much and possessed little outwardly, but I have been free—free—and I have never stifled my natural impulses. My veins are filled with the blood of wanderers. If I settle down I overthrow the law of my being. It is a blind

## A WOMAN OF UNCERTAIN AGE

---

force, although I am not too ignorant to recognize it. But my force must find expression."

"But, Canning, have you no responsibilities in life?"

"The responsibilities of life must wait." His voice broke in a wave of excitement; then he kicked the clutch at his feet, as he continued: "Therefore, I come where I will; I go where I please; I share with those I love; expect little of any man and ask nothing. I shun what I must, love where I choose, and am happy and free. Life is a simple calculation to me."

He sprang out of the car, as though to preclude further talk on the subject. After inspecting the new tire—by the way of a kick with the toe of his boot—he drew a gold cigarette-case from his pocket.

He took out a cigarette and lighted it. His eyes were full of humor, but he did not speak.

The Woman watched his movements for a few seconds, more puzzled than before. Then she said:

## A WOMAN OF UNCERTAIN AGE

---

"Come closer, Canning; I love cigarette smoke."

He was always obedient to her commands, so he came close to the car and shyly puffed at the cigarette until her face was enwreathed in smoke.

"Don't you smoke?" he ventured to ask. "All ladies on the other side do."

"No, not yet. It is one of the pleasures I am saving. Dear me, but you are a strange boy. It would seem that you have been going about all your life seeking—living in your own way, yearning in your romantic brain to be loved much."

The Boy shrugged his shoulders, as he again took his seat, and smiled a bit sarcastically as he started the car homeward.

All this while the condition of the Woman and her husband remained the same. Consequently it seemed to her that she must keep on dreaming, although at times she felt she would gladly have given up all thoughts of the Boy if her husband had only made some slight effort to

## A WOMAN OF UNCERTAIN AGE

---

win her back—if he had bestowed upon her some of the little attentions she stood so much in need of—if he had only petted and loved her just a little. She felt his power was as iron over her, that he could keep her, and keep her good, if he would only make the effort.

She realized that this sort of life could not last. She could not endure the stern, cold indifference of this good husband, for whom she had so much respect. Even the lukewarm affection she had been so long accustomed to was now withheld. Yet she was unable to imagine how there could ever be any comfortable existence without him. He had a great power over her mind, and she believed that she could never have any real or peaceful happiness but at his side. Yet she craved love so deeply, and she found such satisfaction and delight in the Boy's presence!

The situation was pitiful in the extreme. Here was a healthy woman struggling with herself, feeling she must either suffer as she had for years,

## A WOMAN OF UNCERTAIN AGE

---

or follow inclinations which would lead she knew not where. The man to whom she was married was to her "the best man on earth," and she knew life would be empty without him. She realized how contemptible she would appear to him and to their world, if she should accept the love her soul craved. But her present life seemed beyond her power of endurance. Her impulses were good, but *passion* was stronger.

She knew her husband loved her in his quiet way, but her longing for demonstrative affection seemed eating out her very soul. Her starving soul was always crying out: "I want to be loved!" and it seemed to her that an hour of loving would be worth years of this dead and passionless existence.

"Peace comes to those who bring it, joy to those who give it, and a peaceful understanding to those who love perfectly." Alas, she had lived too many years with her disappointed hopes; she had too often drenched her midnight pillow with

## A WOMAN OF UNCERTAIN AGE

---

tears of vague regret. She was weary of living. She was good, but she was miserable. If she did this thing which her heart prompted, would she not be more wretched for all the remaining days of her life? Who could foretell?

The perfect opportunity seemed to be all that had hitherto been lacking, but love can always be trusted to provide the perfect opportunity.

## CHAPTER V.

' THE winter in town, with its round of pleasures and social functions, had passed, and the Stewarts were preparing to go to their country place. The Woman and the Boy had lived in the same house all this time, but separate, with nothing between them but their love and desire.

Captain Stewart had spent a part of the winter at home, always wearing his sturdy air of possession, which made the Boy feel uncomfortable and jealous. He now started off on a short trip, and the spring was upon them. Surely romance could not set so sweet a snare in vain. All the long winter they had been content to love, to sigh hopelessly at a distance, but now the spring had come—the spring of their love. And so the Boy gained courage and resolved to take fate into his own hands.

## A WOMAN OF UNCERTAIN AGE

---

The Woman had resisted him for many months, although he believed in his heart that she wanted to make the experiment. She had preached the freedom of love to him, and he had listened with hope and with desire; for, although young, he knew the subtle thoughts of women. He had never left her in a state of indifference; he felt hers to be a nature that would have emotions, and he gave them to her in full measure. Thus the romance of his life had begun, and he watched the Woman steadily. She was romantic—this he knew; and she had everything in life her heart could wish for. She had as much as told him that her life was empty, but it needed no telling. He had long known her to be a woman of the intensest nature, who was smothering out her very soul.

"Lucky dog to be the fortunate man even to know it," he thought. "The gods have indeed been good to me—'tis for me to do the rest."

That night he instructed the mechanic at the

## A WOMAN OF UNCERTAIN AGE

---

garage to get the Renault runabout ready to go out at a moment's notice.

"And be sure it goes, or I'll kill you when I get back," he said. Slipping a crisp bill into the good-natured Irishman's hand, he added:

"Remember, this runabout is the only machine to go out of here to-morrow."

The mechanic nodded understandingly. All the men in the garage were slaves to him; he ruled over them like a monarch, yet they were always ready to obey his orders.

The Boy knew there was to be a bridge party the next afternoon, and he planned accordingly. At exactly five o'clock, the beautiful, four-cylinder, seventy-horse power runabout, in perfect condition, was waiting at the steps of her house on upper Fifth Avenue. In spite of his anxiety lest there should be an outburst from the Woman, he felt a glow of joy and satisfaction. He was a gallant gentleman, and fear had no place in his romantic veins to-day. A few moments passed in waiting,

## A WOMAN OF UNCERTAIN AGE

---

but they seemed like hours to him. Then the door opened, and the Woman of Uncertain Age came slowly down the steps. She wore a brown Directoire gown, and her exquisitely poised head was crowned by a sable toque, with a bunch of violets at the side. In her hands she carried an immense sable muff.

The Boy thought he had never seen so charming a woman; she knew so well what suited her best. This robust healthy woman, with her gracious yet commanding air, made the blood in his veins tingle. With passionate delight he absorbed every detail, almost forgetting to touch his cap to her.

"Good-evening, Canning," she said simply, but with an unusual sweetness. "Will you tell me why we have this car when I ordered the Limousine?"

"I am sorry, ma'am, but the Limousine is in the workshop and could not be finished in time."

She looked a little annoyed, but he imagined she was not greatly displeased. He had heard her say

## A WOMAN OF UNCERTAIN AGE

---

she loved the sound of the cylinder and coil, and she had also expressed a desire to ride "right fast" in the runabout. Telling the servant at the door to bring a motor coat and a veil, she glanced again disapprovingly at the runabout. Slipping into her coat when it was brought, and stuffing the veil into her muff, she climbed into the car. The Boy wrapped the sable rug around her with great care, then jumped into the seat beside her.

"Now for it," he said to himself, and he felt like a king on his throne.

He threw open the switch. Would it spark without cranking? Of course, it would do anything he wanted of it to-day, but it was not every car that would take a spark at the throw of the switch.

He thought himself a lucky fellow to have her beside him in the runabout. Now he would give her a spin that she would never be able to forget. It might be their last, but this was his hour. He felt his whole being thrill at the prospect.

"Go to Armstrong's," she ordered coldly.

## A WOMAN OF UNCERTAIN AGE

---

His heart sank, but before they reached the house she told him to go on, that the day was too glorious to be spent indoors, that she felt nervous and cross, and the ride would do her good.

The Boy was delighted. He was an enthusiastic motorist; and he knew his car. If it would only go and go! He was never more happy than when he drove, steered and ran this runabout. He drove slowly out Fifth Avenue to One Hundred and Tenth Street, up St. Nicholas Avenue, then by way of Seventh to Jerome. He was making straight for the Boston Post Road. On Jerome he slowed down, when she said:

"We are certainly tempting the police, and I fear we will be pinched."

He laughed. On, on, they went. They were going at a desperate clip. The air hummed, everything whirled by, and the grit stung their faces in a steady stream. He had cut out the muffler, because she had said she liked the noise, and if speed could be determined by the noise the ma-

## A WOMAN OF UNCERTAIN AGE

---

chine was making, they might easily have been going a hundred miles an hour. Was there ever anything so trying to a lover as this uncertainty? The faster they flew the more reckless he became. The machine was saying things to him now. He was driving like mad, and he felt she loved it, too, though she said not a word. He was right—she loved it, and she was proud that he was quite equal to it. She felt that she belonged to him. The car ate up miles after miles. It was more delightful every moment. The seventy-horse power did not balk once. The Boy had it well in hand, and neither felt the shadow of a fear.

The Woman was disappointingly quiet, and as he was her chauffeur to-day in every particular, he was most proper and careful with her, although he felt that he understood her perfectly. But it was not the silence of embarrassment. He waited. He feared to talk first, lest he might spoil it all. At the new Pelham Bay Bridge they were warned by a brass-buttoned officer to slow down. He

## A WOMAN OF UNCERTAIN AGE

---

did until he felt that they were safely out of sight. Again they flew until they passed Travers Island Club House and the New York County line. Now he felt sure of no policemen for a while. Like the wind, he drove past New Rochelle, Larchmont and Blossom Heath Inn, taking steep hills and making wild dashes. Was she angry with him, or did she like this being run away with? She had not even inquired where he was going, and he made up his mind he would go on and on all night until she talked to him. He felt brave as a lion, though his courage to talk had apparently left him. Outwardly, he was again the shy boy he believed she liked him to be, but he was getting reckless. Should he stop the car? Was she never going to talk to him? The silence was like despair to both of them now.

Finally the Woman said:

"Did ever a machine go so beautifully? This is glorious, Canning. I've never before known the real delight of motoring, but I'm afraid we are

## A WOMAN OF UNCERTAIN AGE

---

going too fast. We will surely meet one of those snake-in-the-grass policemen and be run in, and that would spoil it all."

The Boy's only answer was to drive faster. On they went, only slowing down at the sight of a cop, both dreaming their dreams as the speedometer ticked off more and more miles. They had passed a number of people they knew, and the Woman wondered what they would think, seeing her so far from home, and going at such a devilish rate. Doubtless, they would think it very improper and not at all respectable, but she didn't care. Respectability and propriety were lost to her this evening. She was her real self, doing for the first time not what was strictly right, maybe, but that which gave her real enjoyment.

This wild ride across the country beside the Boy was delightful, and she believed that unless restrained by remorse and shame after it, she would do it again and again, and yet again.

"Canning," she said, "do you know I am my

## A WOMAN OF UNCERTAIN AGE

---

real self this evening, following my one mad desire? I couldn't have believed I would have the courage to do it, but the thought of it required more courage than the deed."

The Boy pretended not to hear. They were at the foot of a hill and he was preparing for the climb in front of him. He took it at high speed.

"A car that can take that hill at high speed is a corker," he said.

"Oh, that was splendid! I am glad I came, now, Canning."

"So am I," he answered.

"But I am getting powerful hungry; can't we have something to eat?"

"Yes," he replied. "There is a road-house a little farther on."

He slowed down.

"Why are you going so slowly? Do you want me to starve?"

He frankly told her he was sorry to have the ride end, as his pleasure would end, too.

## A WOMAN OF UNCERTAIN AGE

---

"Oh, but you are coming in to have something with me."

"Really, do you mean it? Don't you mind?"

"No; mind, of course I don't. I would love it, and I wish it."

"But it isn't safe for you to be seen dining with your chauffeur. What a sensation that would create!"

"I don't care to create a sensation, but I want you to dine with me. This is truly a lark, and it won't be complete unless you do. You will come with me, won't you?" she said pleadingly.

Come! Would he! He was mad with joy; his dream seemed fast coming true. It was agreed that they should go on a few miles farther to a more secluded place, where they would not be so likely to see some one they knew. He was filled with happy thoughts now.

As they approached the inn, which was ablaze with lights, they saw people dining inside and out

## A WOMAN OF UNCERTAIN AGE

---

on the enclosed porches. There was a hum of voices and laughter, the merry sound of popping corks and clinking glasses.

The Boy ran the car into one of the sheds and put the switch-plug into his pocket. Then he lighted a cigarette and looked all the cars over, trying to determine if there was any one there who knew them. The chauffeurs were all at their dinner in a small dining-room off the kitchen. He peered cautiously in. There seemed to be no one he knew. After washing and making himself presentable, he slipped in at a side door and took a small table in the corner, in the most secluded part of the room. The Woman joined him in a few moments, looking as sweet and fresh as if she had come from her own dressing-table. Like many clever women she could get a complete toilet out of a chamois carried in her stocking. Two cocktails were waiting. She drank hers and ate a cracker. Soon she began to talk. A cocktail has that effect sometimes, and it always had on her. They had a sort of

## A WOMAN OF UNCERTAIN AGE

---

heart-to-heart talk, she taking him into her confidence, yet telling him little he had not already guessed. Her face was radiant, and after her first glass of champagne her manner toward him was delightful.

"Why don't you talk, Canning? I love your English accent," she said. "As a rule I hate Englishmen. Tell me something, will you? Are you really English, or what are you? Sometimes I think you are Irish."

"Why do you care?"

"Oh, I don't care," she said, tossing her head.  
"A man's a man for a' that."

He liked this mood in her. She seemed to have forgotten he was anything but what he should be, and he had entirely forgotten that he was her chauffeur.

She observed with not a little surprise his exceedingly graceful and well-shaped hands, with their carefully manicured nails, and the nicotine stains on the fingers. If he had been a prince she

## A WOMAN OF UNCERTAIN AGE

---

could not have treated him more like an equal, and without the least effort on her part.

The dinner was distinctly moderate. They were too happy to give much thought to the *menu*. The Boy's heart was swelling with emotion, a rage of passion was racing through him. If he could only clasp her in his arms and kiss her! He could have strangled her with love had he dared; and she would have loved it. Had he been sure of this, he would have devoured her—he would have risked all.

The dinner was ended too soon. The bill was brought and laid in front of the Boy.

"Give it to me," she said, reaching for it.

He held it beyond her reach.

"Give it to me, will you? Give it to me, I say!"

She was in a temper now, and such a temper—it was one of her strangest charms.

He awoke to the fact that he was only a poor chauffeur. Of course, that was the reason she wanted to pay the bill. All the pride of genera-

## A WOMAN OF UNCERTAIN AGE

---

tions rose within him. He hated himself, and his brain was in a whirl. What! Was he to let a woman pay for his dinner?

The Woman's mood changed. She laid her hand caressingly on his arm.

"Now, don't be cross, sweet, proud Boy. I wouldn't think of allowing you to do it. It would just spoil all this glorious lark. I understand you, you foolish, proud Englishman, and I like the spirit in you, but you mustn't mind, dear."

She patted his brown hand, puckered up her red lips poutingly, and tossed her head up at him.

"Oh, you are so sweet, and I'd just love to pay for it. I would like to do lots of things for you, but you are so proud. Even the suggestion seems to hurt you."

"There is only one thing I would permit you to do," answered the Boy.

"Oh, really? And what is that?"

He whispered something to her, but she didn't seem to catch it.

## A WOMAN OF UNCERTAIN AGE

---

"I think we had better be going," she said.

He begged her to stay just a little while longer —just until he smoked another cigarette. He had guessed the power cigarette smoke had over her, and he lighted one while he awaited her reply.

"Oh, you are so sweet when you plead like that. I love it in you, Canning."

Wine, pleasure and passion mingled with the odor of cigarettes, and in the heated atmosphere the delirium of love possessed them. The fascination of the Boy was upon her, her life seemed to be hanging by a thread. He leaned over and kissed her arm, then half sobbed as he raised his head. She smiled back at him, pinching her full red lips and making the sound of a kiss as she did it.

"Oh, you are so sweet! You are the most companionable man I have ever known."

Was it the champagne that was doing all this, or was it her real self?

Just then they heard a well-known voice.

## A WOMAN OF UNCERTAIN AGE

---

"Great Heavens!" the Woman gasped; "it is Lord Anthony!"

They both slipped out quietly and, they hoped, unseen, by a side door near the table.

The Boy was furious, but he was anxious for the Woman's safety. It took him but a moment to install the switch-plug and crank his engine. They slid out into the road, then shot into the darkness on a direct road back to town.

The night was beautiful. They spun along, neither speaking a word for some time. All his hopes were crushed beneath the motor's wheels. To be so tortured was hideous.

"Why don't you say something to me? Are you pouting or sulking?" she asked.

"Neither; but I have despaired of ever making myself understood."

The storm within him was ready to burst forth at the slightest touch. He was bravely concealing the fire that was consuming him.

She pressed his arm caressingly.

## A WOMAN OF UNCERTAIN AGE

---

"Oh, but I do understand. Do you think I am made of sawdust? I am very much alive to the same emotions."

She was about to bury her head on his shoulder and weep.

Alas! they whirled around a corner straight into the arms of a big, burly policeman. The Boy muttered curses as he stopped the car.

"You are under arrest; you were going fifty miles an hour."

"The devil you say!" the Boy retorted angrily.

"You can say that to the judge, if you like, but come on to the station with me."

They meekly allowed him to hang on the step of the car.

"I guess you know the way; right around here."

"But, my good man, you are wrong," pleaded the Woman.

"Oh, cut it out!"

"It is outrageous," insisted the Woman. "We were not going over twenty-five miles an hour."

## A WOMAN OF UNCERTAIN AGE

---

"Oh, forget it, madam!"

"You are a miserable beast. I cannot permit you to arrest us. We are on our way to a very sick friend, and haven't a single moment to spare. Can't I give you something and persuade you to forget that you saw us? That's a good man, now."

Pulling out her purse, she held it before his face.

"Take that, and let us go."

The policeman chuckled.

"I can't take nothing. You come on to the station. Right around here, now—right in front of you, there; that stone building."

"It's no use," whispered the Boy. "Don't be frightened. I'll just say you're my wife."

She was going to the police station, but not without protest. She was frightened nearly to death, but her temper was up now.

"You miserable beast!—you flannel-mouth! We were not going over twenty-five miles an hour, I tell you."

## A WOMAN OF UNCERTAIN AGE

---

Their captor laughed. This was a new phase—to have a woman talk to him like this.

"You are old offenders, that's sure, all right."

"Don't!" whispered the Boy; "it will only make it harder for me."

They had pulled up in front of the station. She slipped her purse into the Boy's hand as he left the car.

Trembling with fear and anger, terror-stricken for the moment, she wondered if the Boy would be equal to it. She thought of her sleeping children at home. What a fool she had been to allow this desire for excitement to destroy her, perhaps forever. Her "seventy-horse power lark" in the run-about had come to a sudden end in front of the police station. Could anything be more humiliating?

The Boy overheard the policeman telling the sergeant at the desk:

"Sure, it's a bloomin' young millionaire I have pulled, and I do believe he is eloping with a woman."

## A WOMAN OF UNCERTAIN AGE

---

She's a stunner, too, but, gee! she's got a temper. She tried to bribe me, God bless her, and I tell you, sergeant, I came near taking it, too, and a kiss off her hand as well. She smelled as sweet as a fresh bloomin' bed of violets."

"It's the first decent haul you've made this week. Did he resist arrest?" asked the sergeant.

"No; but his companion did. She called me a beast."

The sergeant laughed heartily.

The Boy was summoned to the desk, wearing an expression of outraged innocence.

"Well, have you anything to say for yourself, young man?"

"Yes; I have a lot to say."

"Well, you better not be saying it. It won't be good for you," said the policeman.

"Oh, rot!"

"I told you, sergeant, he was a giddy millionaire, and he's an impudent one, too."

"Will you shut up!" commanded the sergeant.

## A WOMAN OF UNCERTAIN AGE

---

"What's your name?"

"Duffy Canning," he answered quickly.

"Where do you live?"

He told him.

"What is your occupation?"

"I haven't any."

"Didn't I tell you he was a bloomin' millionaire?" interrupted the policeman.

"That will do, young fellow; I've had plenty of your smartness. Who is the woman with you?"

Canning wanted to answer: "None of your damned business," but he replied very meekly: "She is my wife."

"Ho! ho! ho! I don't believe it, sergeant."

"Will you shut up, Mike! Bring the lady in. I'll see what she has to say."

The Boy was nearly paralyzed at this request, but he realized that protest would do no good.

The burly policeman disappeared out of the door, and the Boy wondered what was happening. In a few moments he was enlightened, for the policeman returned, exclaiming:

## A WOMAN OF UNCERTAIN AGE

---

"The lady refuses to come in, sergeant."

"Bring her in, then," thundered the sergeant.

The Boy thought this a miserable business, but he was prudent and silent.

Presently the policeman returned, accompanied by the Woman. She was in a furious temper. With cheeks glowing and eyes snapping, she looked straight in the face of the sergeant and tossed her head back in defiance. The old sergeant stared in astonishment, and smiled as any human man would at seeing such a beautiful creature in such a temper.

"Do you know this young man, madam?"

"I certainly do; he's my husband," she said sweetly, with another toss of her head and a little shrug of her shoulders.

The policeman chuckled again.

"I don't believe it, sergeant."

"Will you be good and shut up!—you horrid old thing!" said the Woman.

Then turning to the sergeant, she continued:

## A WOMAN OF UNCERTAIN AGE

---

"This is most embarrassing, sir, to say the least, so let us pay our fine and go on our way. We will give bond—anything you require; but, really, we must go on."

"Very well, madam; that will be all from you."

"Thank you,"" she said, a little sarcastically, as she turned to go. Climbing to her seat in the runabout, she thanked her stars that it had been no worse.

The Boy was soon at her side.

As he came out the door, he caught sight of a well-known newspaper reporter. Their eyes met, and Canning knew that they had been recognized; but he said not a word to the Woman. He made up his mind that he would spend the entire night at the newspaper office. He would buy the whole front page of the next morning's issue, if necessary. Her name must never appear. He would suppress it, no matter what the cost. A notice would ruin her and end his romance, that had only just begun.

As the machine stopped at the steps of her

## A WOMAN OF UNCERTAIN AGE

---

house, he pressed her hand gently. She did not seem to notice it. They said nothing; there was silence, a silence that spoke far more eloquently than words of disappointment would have done.

The Boy awoke late the next morning. He hurriedly dressed and secured the morning paper. Looking through it, he said:

“It was decent of them not to print it.”

## CHAPTER VI

"GUARDA-CRELE," Captain Stewart's Italian villa, was again open for the summer. Overlooking the sea and surrounded by an estate of many acres, its stately beauty and picturesque gardens had long given it high rank among the notable houses of America.

On entering the hall, an impression of antique grandeur was made by the old Italian ormolu mirrors, the magnificent ormolu coffers and beautiful tapestries, all blending to create a perfect whole.

Difficult as it is to make one Newport house different from its neighbors, there was a notable distinction in the Stewart villa. Each room had its individual note and treatment. A large room, which had been added at the rear and which had been used by Captain Stewart as a sanctum, was indeed unique. A more masculine or sportsman-

## A WOMAN OF UNCERTAIN AGE

---

like room it would be difficult to conceive, yet it possessed every comfort and luxury. Here were gathered curios of every description, from every country and clime. The wall on one side was covered with heads of innumerable specimens of deer, antelopes, zebras, chamois and rhinoceros, interspersed with weapons of all kinds in use among civilized and savage races. A splendidly stuffed lion's skin and head hung on the wall over the open fireplace, which was partially concealed by a quaint screen of zebra skin. Most of these specimens had been collected by Captain Stewart on his various trips. The floor was covered with skins of many kinds, and in every respect the room showed its owner to be an enthusiastic big-game collector.

Adjoining this room was a small sleeping-apartment with bath. The hunter's suite, as it was known, had an outside entrance leading to the Italian gardens below.

Connected with the hunter's suite by a winding passage was the Woman's apartment, and it was

## A WOMAN OF UNCERTAIN AGE

---

here that she now whiled away many weary and happy hours.

This woman, who had become such a power in society, now spent the most of her time in seclusion. Neither her spirit of energy and enterprise, which had been brought largely to bear upon the whole of her social career, nor her interest in charitable work, were longer exercised. If it could have been said of any woman in Newport that she had a salon, it was the Woman of the story, for at her home one was sure to meet politicians, diplomats, and men of science of world-wide fame.

But the Woman longed now for just the simple life, where she might be alone and thoroughly enjoy her new and delightful thoughts in repose.

Since her wild ride with the Boy, a subtle change had occurred in their relations—some mysterious force had taken complete possession of her. This woman, who had always lived in a world of charming intellectual men, found the Boy, who was an alien to her class, possessed of all the qualifications

## A WOMAN OF UNCERTAIN AGE

---

to make her happy. He had a charm and a fascination all his own, and he grew more congenial every day.

By her confession on the night of their motor ride, she had been created anew in the Boy's heart; the scales had fallen from his eyes, and she was transfigured before him—throbbing with unabated youth, alive to all its joys and pains, and conscious of the living fire which was burning in his veins. His mad desire to possess her increased daily.

The Woman no longer tried to control herself. But why should she? Why deny longer herself this love?

One morning, while riding beside the Boy to a distant station to meet some friends, she blurted out something. He was quick to understand, and responded sweetly and manly—he would not have been half a man had he done otherwise. The shy Boy, as she had always liked to call him, had plenty of audacity, both of character and manner, this morning. . . .

## A WOMAN OF UNCERTAIN AGE

---

A spot more secluded two lovers could not have wished for. He stopped the car for a few moments and pressed kisses on her lips, so long unsought, uncared for. They were sweet and precious to him, and he was simply irresistible to the Woman, who had spent two-thirds of her life alone.

The Boy had not disappointed her.

## CHAPTER VII

WEEKS and months passed swiftly after this. The Woman had taken the Boy entirely under her protection. He rarely went to his room that he did not find some indication of her having been there, doing some little act which gave evidence of her affection. She planned everything for his happiness and comfort, in order to make him feel his position less. He even found his linen and hose mended, and he blushed at her charitable occupation of love. In spite of himself, she took charge of all his little comforts, telling him it was her greatest pleasure to do these things. "It is so sweet to do things for those we love," she would say. How could he repulse these delicate attentions? She would sometimes, when he had been driving late, steal in noiselessly at night with some dainty repast for him. She displayed the tact of

## A WOMAN OF UNCERTAIN AGE

---

a woman combined with the inventiveness of a child.

Her power to love had broken out like a fire long smothered. She had completely fallen a prey to her insane desires and passion. Yet, dear moralist, you must take into consideration the physical condition of this woman and its necessities. She had found in this man the fulfilment of her years of dreams. Her love for him was the beginning of a new life, and it was heaven to her.

She unfolded all the secrets of her heart to him in her bed whispers, always telling him how long the day had been and how eager she was for his caresses. He would smoke and she would kiss him after each puff, always taking away what was to her the sweetest perfume on earth—the delicious odor of cigarettes—and leaving for him the delicate impression of her soft, perfumed skin, fine lace and linen.

Life was a veritable dream to them both. All day long he would be dignified, though wearing

## A WOMAN OF UNCERTAIN AGE

---

the face of a happy lover, and give her a stolen glance occasionally. In return she would give him such looks as only a loving woman can, the bright, happy glances that revealed the depths of the soul. Her love had a greater sweetness in it because her soul had been so full of disappointment. They shared the secret between them, always conscious of some understanding whenever they looked at each other, and this knowledge brought them closer together every day. . . .

This daring, romantic Canning believed that he had been born for an insatiable love. He had scorned and reasoned with himself in vain. A woman in the humbler ranks of life had never had the least fascination for him. A *viv l'amour* —but let it be in silk and lace, surrounded with the luxury which so marvelously embellishes it. He enjoyed making havoc with the Woman's elaborate toilettes and scented hair. He too, had found his ideal, the love of his dreams. Adorers swarmed on all sides, but for him she reserved her

## A WOMAN OF UNCERTAIN AGE

---

love. He worshiped her yards of lace and ribbon and the exquisite scent of violets that was always about her. She had seemed to rise farther and farther above him, but the higher she rose the fairer she seemed. . . .

When two people are happy there is little to be said of them. The Woman had regained both health and sweet temper. Her life was no longer meaningless. It was delightful to her to watch the wholesome state of the Boy's mind, with his new and vigorous enthusiasms. She devoted all her time and thought to him, to her home and her children. Every detail received careful attention, and each one seemed to contribute to her happiness. She went out little and seldom ever at night. In fact, she was perfectly happy. She had sacrificed all her social life to him, but she felt entirely repaid.

The Boy had been transferred to the hunter's suite. The bond between them was thoroughly established. She quite forgot in her tender self-

## A WOMAN OF UNCERTAIN AGE

---

sacrifice that she had been loved before. They both understood that this life could not last, and they often talked of its certain end. She sometimes whispered that she wished she could go away with him where they might try life alone, and always wondering which one would tire first. She always told him she was afraid that the face of some young girl would take him from her, and, of course, it would be but natural. He would hold her close in his embrace, telling her that that would never be, that he thought of no one but her, that although she was some years older, she need have no fear, because she had inspired a great love, and he appreciated her more because she was a mature woman. This sounded reassuring, but she had her fears. She had soon found that he had been the plaything of other women, and it made her jealous.

This intense woman lacked logic. She was cruelly unjust and insulting when her passion and jealousy were aroused.

## A WOMAN OF UNCERTAIN AGE

---

These moods and misunderstandings galled the Boy and wounded his pride. Who was he that he should have allowed himself to belong so entirely to any woman, to be so controlled by her will? Where was it going to end? And was he not in his heart beginning to fear her in her jealous tempers? Then a feeling of great love and pity would creep into his heart for this woman, who loved him with such intensity. He felt that there were other things in life for him to do, but this woman, who had given herself up wholly to her love, clung so to him that he felt he would be but a cowardly thing to leave her.

She was not young, but she was something more. She was a woman ripe to that last great love she had bestowed upon him. But he realized in spite of all that he cared too much for this life with her.

If she did not greet him in person when he entered his rooms in the evening, he always found some home-like or loving touch from her hands.

## A WOMAN OF UNCERTAIN AGE

---

If it was cool there was a fire, and his arm-chair would be drawn up close and his slippers toasting before it. There were always a fresh supply of cigarettes, and new books for him to read. It was home to him. He found his bed turned down, and a silken gown had long since replaced his plainer one. He would turn in feeling satisfied with life—and she always came.

It was heaven to her. She felt a whole night away from him would be a source of regret for all the rest of her life, and she had always to tear herself away. Then, going back to her own rooms, she would get into her silken bed without a touch of shame or regret, thinking how delicious were love and passion, and feeling thankful that she had them both. . . .

## CHAPTER VIII

THEIR great happiness lasted throughout the summer. She liked to call it her "Summer of Love." Then, suddenly, she became furiously jealous for some cause, whether real or imaginary. They had lived for many months in the closest companionship, giving each other everything, until they seemed united in body and in soul.

Her jealousy extended to his photographs, to everything in his room that hinted at his past, and it had been particularly aroused by finding the picture of a young girl wrapped in an old silk handkerchief—a girl young and sweet, whose image she had always feared.

She had felt sure that there was a woman behind all the letters he received so regularly, yet she had not the least intention of giving him up. She was going to keep him, if possible, by love; if not, by

## A WOMAN OF UNCERTAIN AGE

---

any other means. She was not afraid of pain or responsibility. She would sacrifice anything or everything, but she must keep him. She could never go back to that old life of longing and disappointment. He had frankly told her that there had been other women in his life. Of course, every man has had some loves, but these were all dead and past.

"There is no one now but you, dearest," he would say. "You are enough. You won't make yourself unhappy any more, will you?"

Then she would cuddle close into his strong young arms, asking him to forgive her and promising that she would never be jealous or foolish again.

Days and weeks passed in quiet happiness. They had resumed their peaceful and deliciously close existence, but it was only for a short period. The pangs of jealousy again seized her, and this time it was worse than before. She must see all those photographs and letters burned before her

## A WOMAN OF UNCERTAIN AGE

---

eyes. If they really were, as he said, the records of "dead and gone loves," why keep all these things that reminded him of them? Why not burn them and have them out of her sight forever?

The Boy experienced all the suffering of a man who sees himself doubted and misunderstood by the woman he loves. He was hurt, but he made no complaint. He knew, after all these months of intimacy, that it was only her great love for him which prompted her actions. It annoyed him, but after all was it not the sort of love he had craved? He was beginning to feel the strength of the tie between them.

One night as they lay side by side, both dreaming with their eyes wide open, the Boy thought of the pain the reading of these letters would cause her, and of what they would disclose. Surely she would not want to read them. She would be satisfied to burn them unread. The truth was too ugly. Why spoil this beautiful life? He would

## A WOMAN OF UNCERTAIN AGE

---

not permit her to peruse a single letter. He strained her to his bosom until she fairly cried out with delight under his caresses.

"Since there is no one in all the world I love but you, you may do what you like with all the old love-letters. Burn them all to-night if it will make you happier."

Both her soft arms were around his neck. She kissed his eyes and his hair. She was so coaxing, so exquisite in her voluptuous caressing.

"Oh, if I had only known you before you had loved all those other women."

The Boy felt grateful that she had found him at all.

"Whatever you wish shall be, my own, for I adore you."

Did he mean he would really let her burn the letters?

Then passion slept for a while. The Boy had been so deliciously stupefied by her caressing breath that his eyes were soon closed in sleep. He awoke

## A WOMAN OF UNCERTAIN AGE

---

and reached for her, but she was not there. He heard the rustling of paper, and raising himself on his elbow, he gazed in the direction from which the sound came. There she was, in all the splendor of her voluptuous form, seated on a lion's skin in front of the fire, with his box of photographs in her lap, and his letters on the floor beside her. One by one she examined the photographs, as only a jealous woman can, then tossed them into the fire. The Boy watched her in wonder and pity. In spite of the horrible jealousy that blanched her lips and caused her hands to tremble, he thought her the most fascinating creature that he had ever seen. She read each inscription on the photographs, then threw one after another into the fire, sneering with contempt as she did so, quite unmindful of the flames that soared up the chimney. She appeared to be studying the style and characteristics of the writing, and to look for something special that eluded her. She threw the last photograph into the flames; then, taking up the bundle

## A WOMAN OF UNCERTAIN AGE

---

of letters, she was untying the ribbon that held them together.

The Boy was paralyzed for an instant. What was she going to do? Would she dare to read his letters? He decided she would dare anything in her jealous rage, and if he allowed her to read them his romance would be over. He felt sure that there would be another outburst of temper. What evil spirit had prompted her to take them? As she tried to untie the knot, he heard her mutter:

"Now I shall know for myself."

He sprang from the bed and endeavored, in a persuasive manner, to take the letters from her. She clasped them to her bosom, love and jealousy raging in her.

"No, dear, I cannot let you read them," he said.

He seized the letters and threw them into the fire, where, in an instant, they were ablaze. She was like a tigress. She made a rush for the letters and in another moment she would have been

## A WOMAN OF UNCERTAIN AGE

---

in the flames. He caught her a little roughly to prevent her from falling into the fire. A sharp cry of pain escaped her lips, and, before he really knew what he was doing, he had gently but firmly pushed her out of the door and locked it.

He listened, trembling and breathless. What had he done? How dared he do such a thing to her? Would she raise an alarm, or would she go to her bed, and send him away to-morrow? He heard her stifled sobs now. She was at the door, begging him to open it. He had never heard such tortured cries and pleadings.

"If you love me a little you will open the door. Say anything, do anything, but open the door."

He opened the door and found her crouching on her knees, with her head against the casing. He lifted her gently, led her to the bed and sat down beside her. She was sobbing aloud, and he was fearful lest some one should hear her. Holding her close to him and trying to soothe her, he said:

## A WOMAN OF UNCERTAIN AGE

---

"Don't cry, dearest; I am sorry; forgive me; but I was afraid for you."

Her only answer was a sob.

"I have hesitated to tell you something, though I have wanted to; but now I will tell you everything, if you will believe and trust me."

But she was in no mood for talk, and she was getting cold.

He put her under the covers, then lighted a cigarette and lay down beside her. She snuggled close to his neck. He really wanted to talk, to tell her many things, but she was no longer cheerful. She clung to him with all the tender affection of a woman whose every emotion brings her closer to the one she loves. To-night he wanted to tell her all; he wanted to take her away, to elope with her, to make her his wife. He felt this would make them both happier than anything else on earth. The idea made him desperate; this woman's faithful devotion had made a man of him. He indulged in his dreams alone, wondering how

## A WOMAN OF UNCERTAIN AGE

---

long this life could continue. Such passionate love seldom lasts, and sometimes he had feared their profoundly touching romance would end in a moral tragedy. He felt it to be pitiful that he had acted so harshly toward her. Why had he not let her read the letters? Then he would not have had to explain. They would have explained everything for him; but in his effort to save her the pain of reading them, he had deeply wounded and offended her heart.

A sudden determination came over him to awaken her and tell her everything, to have it all over with to-night, to undo any wrong that he might have done. Did ever deceit or foolish pride win anything worth while for a man? There was still time to repair everything if she would believe him, but she might fly into a temper and abuse him—and then send him away forever. Anything but that. He was afraid to tell her. The chances of losing her seemed too great. He felt he was a coward to live on like this. He thought of

## A WOMAN OF UNCERTAIN AGE

---

what his father used to say: "A coward dies a thousand deaths, but a brave man only once"; but he was not a coward. He was not afraid to live or to die, but he was afraid of losing this woman, whose long-starved nature had driven her to love him. He believed he was loved as few men are, and that such a love would not be given to him twice in life. She was sleeping softly on his arm, now, her damp cheek and lashes against his neck. It was the first time she had really slept in his arms, for she had always been afraid she would sleep too long. Suddenly there came upon him a desire to weep. He drew his arm softly from under her head, then gently laid her over on the pillow, being careful not to waken her. Taking a cigarette from the table beside the bed and lighting it, he saw her full in the light of the match. She was indeed beautiful. Such neck, arms and shoulders!—what abandon! And this woman before him had not given herself to him in a day or a few weeks; it had taken months and

## A WOMAN OF UNCERTAIN AGE

---

months of love and careful cultivation. Time alone had brought them together. Now there had come to them both that wonderful repose of one nature in another, a sort of religious belief. They had found excessive happiness in each other's company, they had felt secure with each other. The Woman had the genius of her sex; she had brought all her heart and brain to the delight of loving him. All other women seemed like shadows compared to her. In fact, two noble natures had met and blended, drawn each to each by the law of natural attraction.

The clock struck one, then two. They lay side by side. He dared not sleep. He was still dreaming with his eyes wide open. Once he kissed her on the forehead, pushing back a stray lock of hair, hoping she might waken. He wanted so much to talk to her to-night; but she slept as sweetly and peacefully as a child. The clock struck again and again. Toward morning she wakened, turning to him in astonishment and alarm.

## A WOMAN OF UNCERTAIN AGE

---

"Great Heavens, dearest! why did you let me sleep?"

Springing out of bed and slipping on her dressing-gown and slippers, she prepared for a hasty departure. No amount of pleading would induce her to remain.

"I wanted so much to talk to you. Tell me, are you angry with me?" he asked. "Will you forgive me for being so rude to you to-night?"

She kissed him close.

"Of course, I will forgive you, but you must not do it again. It would kill my pride."

He accompanied her to the door, detaining her in a long embrace. Opening the door, he watched her as she glided swiftly out of his sight, his whole being thrilling for the Woman who had such power over him.

## CHAPTER IX

IT was early in October; the day was chilly with a formless blur which was neither fog nor rain. The Woman was most wretched. All the joy of living had gone, because her belief in the Boy had been shattered. His lack of confidence hurt her. If she were only positive of the ugly truth! It had been so easy to love him, and, though she had so grievously departed from the accepted mode of living, she knew that she had been greatly benefited by their life together. . . .

In the course of their love the Boy had found himself, without in the least understanding how it happened, invested with rights which he had seized upon by instinct and without opposition on the part of the Woman. It seemed to him that he was under his own roof, and he had assumed the privilege of looking after her during these months of

## A WOMAN OF UNCERTAIN AGE

---

peace and tranquil happiness. Now something had destroyed all this. At first it appeared a small matter, yet it proved to be great enough to drive this jealous woman almost mad; it threatened to put a swift and fatal ending to their love. It was not a quarrel in the vulgar sense, yet it was worse. And after having known the exquisite delight of so noble and delicate a passion as this high-bred woman had bestowed upon him, Canning was loth to give her up. He had had many experiences and adventures, done many reckless things, and he had been happy but not loved. Also, he had been loved and not happy; but now he loved and was happy. It was indeed a miracle that had been worked in his life. He was sure that the Woman loved him well. She could never have given up all she had for any ordinary love. Now she had told him that he must go, and he feared she would be equal to the parting. In a temper she had told him that she was disgusted with him. She told him that he was tired of living a decent life; that

## A WOMAN OF UNCERTAIN AGE

---

he was not content with one woman's love; that he preferred servant-maids. The environment and associations of his youth clung to him, no doubt. She should have known this long ago. She had been a fool to love such a young simpleton, such a plebeian, a mere boy of the streets.

All his pride had arisen at this, and he had rushed from her presence. He had not seen her since.

Several days had passed, and he had not even caught a glimpse of her. He had feared to go to her, lest there should be another outburst, so he decided that the best and safest thing to do was to go away.

As for the Woman, she felt that this boy on whom she had bestowed the best and most precious treasures of her heart had dared to deceive her. Her future seemed hideous, her humiliation intolerable. She had feared that it would come, yet she was not prepared for it. She despised and cursed herself. She longed for death if the Boy

## A WOMAN OF UNCERTAIN AGE

---

loved another. There was only one thing she could do. She would let him go and forget. Many women had done this, and so must she. But when the first shock was over she was beginning to believe life would be intolerable without him. Then she summoned her pride. He must go. She had already said good-by to him. They had parted forever. She had drunk deep of love for many months, but the end had come. . . . It would be a wild and foolish thing to try to keep him. She could not expect to keep him for long.

She bathed her swollen eyes and put on a little cold-cream and powder. After a long and fervent prayer for strength to forget, she kissed her little son and got into her bed, beside his. She lay there a long while, but she could not sleep. For hours and hours she tried to reason with herself. A woman of her age and sense to permit such a foolish passion to get the better of her. This was surely a punishment for allowing herself to fall in love with a mere boy, who did not know what it

## A WOMAN OF UNCERTAIN AGE

---

meant for a woman like her to love. She felt she had loved and sacrificed too much for him.

With half-closed eyes she watched the face of the child. She was overcome with remorse. As she gazed at the child, the thought that he might some day be ashamed of her made her heart sick, and she was happy in thinking that she had given up the Boy forever. She was too old for such folly, such adventures. She felt that her whole youth had been wasted in longing. If she could keep his love, it would only be for a little while, and would it be well to repeat the sacrifice? No; she must be thankful that she had at least tasted of the joys of passion. She must be content with this small portion which had come—alas!—so late.

She would go back to all that was good and proper, and in return she would get love, affection and pity. There would be no more worry, no more horrible jealousy—life would go on peacefully as before, and she would soon forget. Then she wept

## A WOMAN OF UNCERTAIN AGE

---

herself slowly to sleep. When she awoke her pillow was wet with tears, but she was a different woman, sure of only one thing: that she must have the Boy at any cost.

Making her sweetest bed toilette, putting on a dressing-gown and slippers, she crept softly toward his room. Slowly she felt her way into the hunter's suite, where all the animals seemed to be glaring at her. They terrified her, but she did not stop. She was beginning to smell the familiar odor of cigarettes, again it seemed a determining force in her life. Nervous and shaking, she crept to his sleeping-apartment. The door was open, as it had always been for her. She paused—a sickening chill came upon her. Had she no pride? To let him go seemed the only decent thing left to do, but the thought did not suffice to deter her. There was but one feeling strong in her heart. She spoke softly to him. There was no answer. Again she spoke, and again there was no answer. She went close to the bed,

## A WOMAN OF UNCERTAIN AGE

---

and in her heart she felt she would kill him rather than let him go to another.

He was sleeping quietly as a child, with the covers tucked up close around his brown neck. The moon shone full on his bed. She felt strangely wicked as she looked at him and wondered in her heart if she were really doing him an injustice. Why should she give him up? Why should she not keep him? He was all her soul had longed for. He had satisfied her every dream, and, if anything could keep him, she must do that thing—or kill him. As all these thoughts surged through her, she seated herself on the bed beside him. Just then he put up his arms, drawing her down to him.

"Oh, sweetheart, I am glad you came."

"I had to come," she replied. "There was no use trying to stay away. I was too unhappy to sleep, and I have come to beg you not to leave me."

He sobbed like a child in her arms, but insisted that he must go; that he had promised to marry a girl, and that he must keep his word of honor.

## A WOMAN OF UNCERTAIN AGE

---

"But you have plenty of time to marry, my dear one. You are so young; it would break my heart if you leave me. Tell me about the girl. Don't think you will increase my pain. It would have killed me at first—I was sick, I was mad—but my reason has returned. I felt in my first temper that I would kill you. I have tried to hate you, but I—love you. How am I ever going to live without you? I will give you your liberty—every-thing—if you will only stay—just so I may know you are here."

He told her he would have to go.

The Woman's love, it must be remembered, had passed through endless transformations before it had become so great and perfect. This woman, whom success had attended all her life, who had always known what she wanted and always obtained it, was now seriously in love, and she had always considered real seriousness a sort of social crime. There was no shame in her love for him; only fear that she would lose him.

## A WOMAN OF UNCERTAIN AGE

---

They were both crying, now. He felt the dropping of her tears on his cheek. Then she pressed him close and kissed all his tears away. It seemed to him that all the hope and happiness of the future had gone, and he believed himself a sort of criminal to want to leave her. A man can easily break with a woman who sells herself to him, but this woman had given her very soul to him for love.

Hesitatingly, he told her about the girl. She was a young English girl, and she was *enceinte* by him; hence he felt that he must marry her.

The Woman was silent for some moments. She was weeping on his neck. And suddenly he knew that he had not until to-night realized what their parting really meant. He had hoped to slip away without causing her much distress. Could this really be the end?

The Woman arose with great determination, kissing him good-by, and left the room, telling him she would be a true woman and let him go to the girl.

## A WOMAN OF UNCERTAIN AGE

---

That gentle and passive farewell touched and pained him deeply. But so these two parted, seemingly forever—he to do his duty as a man should to the girl, and she to take up her responsibilities as wife and mother. She crept back to her own room. . . .

## CHAPTER X

WHEN the Boy was out the next day, she went to his rooms. There was the bed, still disarranged and the bed-clothes thrown back just as he had left them. She breathed the smell of burned cigarettes mingled with her own perfume, and it sent a thrill of joy and pain to her heart.

Putting a little present, to which she had pinned a note, in his drawer, she looked at the few remaining pictures. Kissing the miniature of his mother, she whispered to it, tears rolling down her cheeks, that she really loved the dear Boy with all her soul, and that she wanted him for her very own, though she would not knowingly or willingly do him an injustice.

She felt that she must keep him, as her life would be impossible without him. She went to his closet, looked over his scanty wardrobe, and kissed every-

## A WOMAN OF UNCERTAIN AGE

---

thing on the hooks. Then going to his bed, she took up his pillow and buried her face in it.

"Dear little brown sweetheart, you won't go. If you do I will surely die."

The Boy found the note when he came in.

It read:

"MY DEAR: Once more I beg of you not to go. But if you must, take me with you. Take me to England, Italy, any place so that I may be with you always. I love you; I cannot live my life without you. Last night you told me that this was not love, but only passion, and that I would soon get over it. Ah, but it is not true! I love you madly! I love you as a child! No woman ever loved a foolish boy as I love you. I wish you could understand that. My soul has always been calling out 'I want to be loved.' I have suffered. Then you came and my soul cried out 'I love you. I am yours.' I am not bad or wicked; believe me, dear one. I only needed the right man

## A WOMAN OF UNCERTAIN AGE

---

to adjust both my body and soul. Is it so wicked, after all, for my soul to be drawn by a force I cannot resist? Oh, I don't believe it. I tell you, you are mine by the gift of God!

"ISABELLE."

In his haste to read the letter he had overlooked an enclosed check. To it were pinned these words:

"Take this, little sweetheart, and buy our passage to the end of the earth, if you will. I will be ready to go with you whenever you say. And you shall have more and more, and still more, when this is gone. Don't be cross with me for giving you this. I know you cannot do anything without money, and, believe me, it is my greatest pleasure to give it. I have never known the value of money, but I know it now. It is a means to an end. I am so sick and tired of all this display. I want you and only you. I am so eager for a future with you. Life has a different meaning since I

## A WOMAN OF UNCERTAIN AGE

---

have loved you. I could devote the remainder of my life, all my love and ambition, to you. I think I would be happy if you would stay here as you are, but, if you must go, then I go with you. I shall die if you leave me."

Her letter greatly distressed him. Tears came to his eyes as he read it. There had always been a touch of frenzy in her pleadings—but this!

He felt profoundly flattered at being so loved, dazzled by his good fortune, and yet afraid of it. There was no denying that this woman's genius and passionate love had overwhelmed him. If he had loved her before, he loved her even more after reading this letter. He could have given anything to have seen her once more, thrown himself at her feet, and sworn undying love for her.

All that night he spent in regrets and in writing a letter:

"**MY DEAR ISABELLE:** I have passed an endless night, but not without coming to a conclusion.

## A WOMAN OF UNCERTAIN AGE

---

Your letter, with the scrap of paper enclosed (which I return), has crushed me. Forgive me for the cruel things I said to you last night, and, believe me, I did not mean you had 'a bold, defective nature.' I love you madly. But I can no longer live with this awful secret which is throttling me, and which you will not guess. I have tried a hundred times to leave you and go to the ends of the earth, but in an hour I am in your arms. Yet, though I have kindled the fire at the altar of love, I ask you to let me go away and marry this girl and devote my life and my ambitions to her and to my child. I know you must be loved; I know your life. I read the whole history of your heart in your eyes long ago. Oh, why did I fall in love with you? It was not with your beauty. That is surely enough to drive an older, less experienced and passionate man to frenzy; but I loved you for your charming self, for your pure and divine soul, and because I saw in you not only a woman, but an angel. I know you must be loved

## A WOMAN OF UNCERTAIN AGE

---

without rival, without reserve, and forever. I am ready to sacrifice anything and everything for you, but you must not sacrifice yourself. I know your nature, and I feel you never could be happy again if you did what you suggest in your letter. You love me seriously, and I thank God that I have had such a love. I am unworthy of it, but I do love you, and love is a force out of which all that is good and just should spring. I would give my life for you, I would consecrate my blood to you, but I must not ruin *your* life. You must let me go. Good-by, my love.

“CANNING.”

The next morning he was gone. Her heart was nearly broken, but she felt he was wiser than she. Blindly and happily she had submitted to love; but how bitterly she regretted it!—how profoundly she suffered now!

She tried with tears and prayers to forget, but the attempt was hopeless.

## A WOMAN OF UNCERTAIN AGE

---

One day, soon after he left, they met, by accident, in town. The sight of the Boy brought back the longing for the old love and for happiness with him a little while. Again she begged him to come back. He told her he wanted to, but he was going to marry the girl. She went home that night happier for seeing him, and determined to get him back. She was to be in town again soon; and so she wrote him, asking him to come to her. She hoped she might persuade him with money to come back. She of all women to have to buy her lover! But he was the one man in all the world for her, and she must have him.

At the hotel she was assigned to the bridal suite. After a beauty bath and powder, she put on an exquisite gown of lace and lay down on the couch before the fire to wait for him. If he had been a king she could not have made herself more attractive for him. She waited and waited, growing very tired and hungry. She ordered dinner to be served in the room before the open fire. She was

## A WOMAN OF UNCERTAIN AGE

---

sure the Boy would be hungry, and she wanted to dine with him all by herself. She waited and waited. The dinner was served, but she could not eat it. She put the food before the fire to keep it warm. Then she took out a box of his favorite brand of cigarettes. She had brought them from home for him. She opened it, took out a cigarette, kissed it and laid it on the top of the box. She was anxious and unhappy. Every sound she heard, she thought it was the Boy's step. Finally, she could no longer control herself, and, going to the telephone, she called his number. The answer came—he had left yesterday. . . . She told herself there was not another man on earth that would do it. What was she to do? The humiliation and shame of it nearly killed her. Would she have to go back to the old life? After these months of happiness it seemed an impossible thing to do, but she would try. She had always been brave, and she had borne it for years. She knelt and prayed to be forgiven for all her wickedness.

## A WOMAN OF UNCERTAIN AGE

---

She asked God to give her strength to forget, to go back to the old life and its duties, and never to be tempted again. She did not want to be wicked. She only wanted to be loved. She felt frightened when she thought how very near she had come to telling her husband that she loved this Boy, and she would have done it had she felt sure he loved her, and her alone.

She arose very early the next morning, and went first to the good Father who always heard her confessions. She told him frankly she was in love and asked him if it was wicked to follow the instincts of one's soul.

"My soul has always called for a love like this," she told him, "and it has come to me as sweetly and as reverently as it came passionately; as deep as a devoted mother's love, and so great that it is past all bounds of reason."

"Ah, my poor child," the Father said; "and such an admirable mother, too! You are goodness itself. I cannot believe such a womanly nature is

## A WOMAN OF UNCERTAIN AGE

---

to be destroyed by such a foolish passion. We must pray, my child, to forget. You must think only of your husband and the children God has given you."

"I will try," she told him; "but it's too late, I fear. I have given my very soul to this Boy with my kisses."

"Ah, my poor child, and has it gone so far? You must pray for strength—for strength."

## CHAPTER XI

THE Woman had silently accepted the blow of losing the Boy. She had told no one, for to whom could she give her confidence? She made no inquiry about him. When a woman finds herself deserted by the man she loves, time and solitude are her only comforters, but the loneliness and longing for the Boy seemed crushing out her very soul. . . .

Owing to ill-health, Captain Stewart had been retired from the navy, and had spent about a year at Carlsbad. The blow of losing the Boy, followed shortly after by the death of her youngest child, had very much impaired the Woman's health, and she had been ordered by the doctors to join her husband at Carlsbad. She rebelled at first at taking this trip, but, after much persuasion, she had sailed, accompanied by the children, their nurse and governess.

## A WOMAN OF UNCERTAIN AGE

---

At Carlsbad she devoted herself to her invalid husband, and appeared anxious to atone for her selfish neglect. She was especially devoted to an infant boy, who had come into her home just at the right time. Her whole heart and soul seemed to be wrapped up in this new baby. He was so lovely, so soft and pink, with blue eyes, curling lashes and soft, brown hair. He was called the little "pink baby," and as yet had received no other name. . . .

The months dragged on. It was late spring when they returned home, going directly to their cottage at Newport. It was pleasant to be home again, but it was depressing to the Woman, for at every turn she was reminded of the Boy. She had partially regained her health at Carlsbad, but she was again becoming nervous. She grew more miserable at every recollection of those happy, peaceful days when love's dream was satisfied.

They had been parted for many months, during which her time and mind had been occupied with

## A WOMAN OF UNCERTAIN AGE

---

her husband, and with her own ill-health. Now her whole being was filled with regret that she had not seen the Boy before he sailed, but at that time she had feared to trust herself. How she had refused him, she could not understand. Suddenly she was filled with a frantic longing for him. Was there anything she might say to win him back? Of their long association, was there not one memory that would recall him to her? She had so much in her heart to tell him.

One morning, as she was looking over the paper, she saw his name included among the passengers arriving on the *Lusitania*. Her heart leaped with joy; even the sight of his name made her happy. She feared, though, that it might be a mistake; it was hardly likely that a chauffeur would be considered of sufficient importance to have his arrival announced. Doubtless, it was another person of the same name.

'At any rate, she wrote an impulsive note and posted it to his old address in town. She received

## A WOMAN OF UNCERTAIN AGE

---

an immediate response, saying he would be happy to come to her on a certain day. The hours that intervened seemed like weeks to her, but she was happier than she had been since he went away. All her old passion again took possession of her. She hated herself for allowing these emotions to master her. She had tried to forget him and to think only of her duties as wife and mother. For a while she believed that she had conquered herself, but now nothing existed for her but the Boy.

The waiting was agony. Her heart was again filled with jealousy when she thought of the girl he had loved. The fact that she had loved him did not hurt her now; it was only the deceit that worried her, and her husband's pitifully patient look that grieved her. She often wondered if her husband had ever guessed the truth. Could he read her heart? Sometimes she thought he had, yet he was always so considerate, so gentle with her. At times she longed to tell him all. It would be such a relief to her, but she felt it would be a cowardly thing to hurt his kind heart.

## A WOMAN OF UNCERTAIN AGE

---

She was overjoyed at the thought of seeing the Boy. She sang to the little "pink baby," hugging it close in her arms, and whispering something in its tiny ear. He cooed and cooed as though he understood, and seemed to be happy, too.

The day at last arrived. The Woman had arranged everything so as to have a quiet little talk with the Boy in her boudoir. Humming an old love-song, she made her most charming toilette, just as she had done in the old days. She put on her most becoming negligée, the one in which she believed she looked youngest. Then arranging fresh roses on the table and mantel, she endeavored in every detail to make the room look just as it used to look for him.

Going to the little French chiffonier, she took out something that was wrapped in soft paper. Unwrapping it, she pressed the Boy's little brown motor cap to her lips. She had always kept it. Now she was beginning to feel afraid of herself, but she could not stop—the very thought of seeing

## A WOMAN OF UNCERTAIN AGE

---

him was ecstatic. At that moment, she caught the baby's cry. Kissing the little cap once more, she slipped it hurriedly back into the drawer and went into the nursery.

Canning came in quietly and looked about, bewildered and delighted. Seeing a picture of the Woman on the chiffonier, he walked over and took it in his hand. As he looked, he was conscious of the familiar odor of violets, which thrilled him as of old. Then he caught sight of the open drawer, and impulsively he lifted out a lace-trimmed garment with its delicate fragrance and kissed it. When he came to the bottom of the drawer, he caught sight of something that made him stagger back as though he had received a blow. Had this delicate odor intoxicated him? His heart beat with swift, stifling throbs. Then a vision, all lace and ribbons, seemed to lay her warm lips against his cheek. His arms reached out in passionate yearning. For one brief moment he seemed to be completely overcome.

## A WOMAN OF UNCERTAIN AGE

---

The Woman appeared at the door and understood at a glance. Not wishing to embarrass him, she went softly back to the nursery.

The Boy recovered himself, replaced the things in the drawer and closed it. Then he seated himself to wait for her, and at the first sound of her skirts he rose to greet her.

The Woman hesitated in the doorway, with one hand grasping the portière, and the other on her heart as if to still its wild beating. She caught her breath.

"Oh!" Canning, I am so happy to see you again," she murmured. "It was good of you to come."

He had never seen any woman so lovely; she looked younger and more radiant, though she had always been just as old and no older than he wished her to be. The appealing, wistful look in her violet-blue eyes impressed him more deeply than did her great beauty. He advanced quickly to greet her, wishing to take her in his arms in one

## A WOMAN OF UNCERTAIN AGE

---

long embrace; but her greeting was disappointing. She simply extended both her hands to him. He took them in his and pressed them tenderly to his lips.

"I have come across the sea for you, dear one. I could stay away no longer. I have always regretted having left you. Life has been so dreary and empty without you."

"And so it has been with me. I cannot tell you how much I have missed you, but it was better so. You were better and stronger than I, but I have suffered so—my heart was nearly broken at losing you. Yet I am a better woman for it."

She glanced up at him. She saw he was no longer the "shy boy," but a man now; and it was just a little disappointing, as she had hoped to see him the same. She saw the gray hairs, and there was a graver expression to the face. He was much better dressed than she had ever seen him, and there was about his general appearance the air of belonging to the leisure class. He appeared as though he were one of the well-turned-out

## A WOMAN OF UNCERTAIN AGE

---

men one sees lounging about the fashionable clubs. . . .

The dignified manner in which she had received the Boy hurt him. He had hoped that she would greet him as of old; but he was happy and contented to be near her again, and willing to wait for the rest. They talked on quietly, both feeling a little ill at ease. The Boy was deeply impressed with the ineffable tenderness of this Woman who had been so generous in her weakness and so strong in her love for him. He loved her passionately, and he found himself wondering at the strange, happy look in her eyes. He could not understand her, and he was beginning to feel uncomfortable.

He told her he believed she was thinking of the time when he had not come to her at the hotel, and he declared that her letter had reached him too late. He assured her that had he known she was there, no power on earth could have kept him away.

She told him of the death of her child; and how

## A WOMAN OF UNCERTAIN AGE

---

she felt it to be a punishment for her wickedness; of her illness and her trip to Carlsbad, and how the new baby had done more to make her forget than anything else. She told him how happy seeing his name among the steamship arrivals had made her, and how upon the impulse of the moment she had written him to come.

"I would have come, anyway," the Boy said. "Won't you let me tell you why I came? It was all for you, because I love you and cannot live without you."

"It is very wicked of me to send for you, I know. I should have been brave and continued to suffer," she interrupted. "Yes, I know I should have, but it is useless. I can't help loving you any more than I can help breathing."

The lovers understood each other. In their hearts peace and tranquil happiness reigned once more. She wept a little as she told him how unhappy she had been, feeling that he had left her for the girl.

## A WOMAN OF UNCERTAIN AGE

---

He comforted her, telling her it was all a wretched mistake. Alice had never cared for him. He had gone to the appointed place, as he had promised, with every intention of marrying her, but she was gone. He had learned that there had been a child born and that Alice had been taken away by a woman, who he thought was probably her mother. Owing to the circumstances he had not dared to look for her.

All the old love and passion of the Woman's nature went out to him. Her heart was filled with pity and shame. She sobbed softly, unable to speak for a few moments. The Boy was puzzled and pained, as he could not understand her mood. After much coaxing and caressing, she told him the whole story—how the morning after that awful night in town when he disappointed her, she had gone to find Alice, and that the new baby she had spoken of was his son. She had taken it and loved it, even as she had loved him; it was so easy to do this. She told him Captain Stewart had at first re-

## A WOMAN OF UNCERTAIN AGE

---

fused to allow her to keep the baby, as he could not understand why she should want to take some one else's boy when she had children of her own. But she had wept and pleaded, and, as usual, he had let her have her way. After the death of their own child, he had been glad that he had consented, but he had never guessed the truth.

The Boy's brain was in a whirl. He arose and paced the floor, showing how greatly her story had shocked him. Finally, he sank into a chair and bowed his head on his hands. The Woman watched him for a while, then she knelt beside him and tried to explain more fully how she had found the girl so young and sweet, and the latter had confided in her as though she were her mother.

"She told me she loved and trusted you. This made me even more sorry for her, though I knew she had taken you from me. But I had promised God, you and myself to be true to the best in me. If it killed me, I would have befriended the girl.

## A WOMAN OF UNCERTAIN AGE

---

I did everything to make her comfortable, and everything would have gone right, but she had written to her aunt to come to her. When this proud Englishwoman came, she made the poor, ill child miserable with her unkind severity, always making her feel that by her offense she had forfeited all right to consideration and kindness. I was fearfully sorry for her, and soon after the baby came Alice died. Then the revolt and fear that had been gathering in the aunt's heart burst out in a full determination to get rid of the child at once. I begged and pleaded, but the fear of disgrace overpowered all her womanliness. I found her on the verge of leaving the house with a little soft, shapeless bundle in her arms. This terrified me, and, with a pretense of pity, I offered to take the baby and find it a good home somewhere. To this she readily consented. That night I slept with your tiny, living, breathing infant in the hollow of my arm. All night I soothed his soft cries, conscious of a great happiness which the soft

## A WOMAN OF UNCERTAIN AGE

---

weight upon my breast had brought me. You had told me you wanted a son, and, oh, how I wished he had been ours! You mustn't ever take him—he is all I have of you, except this."

Going to the chiffonier drawer and taking out the little brown cap, she said:

"See, I have worn it threadbare with my caresses. I know it has been foolish—my clinging to this—but, really, I could not help it. It has been my only comfort."

The Boy was lost in thought. He did not seem to know what she was saying. He only stared at the wall. She put the cap back in the drawer and went into the nursery for a moment. When she returned he was in the same attitude. The look on his face frightened her. She approached him timidly, and, laying her hands tenderly on his head, she said:

"You are not cross with me, little sweetheart?"

She saw tears in his eyes.

"Cross with you? No! no!" he said, drawing

## A WOMAN OF UNCERTAIN AGE

---

her down to him. "You are the dearest, sweetest woman God ever made. Cross with you? Never! I love you with all my heart for this."

"And you won't ever take the baby from me?"

"Take him from you? Never! never! He is nothing to me without you. I want you both now. My God, what a woman you are!"

She saw the passion rising and swelling in him. Again she realized that he was a man. He caught her in his arms and kissed her violently before she could prevent it. She released herself quickly, but with a certain dignity.

"Oh, don't do it!" she said. "Can't you see I am not in any mood for this? This darling little pink baby of yours has kept me good. I cannot have a wicked thought when I look at him. Yes, this blessed little helpless child of yours has driven all the devil and passion out of me; this baby which is a part of you. I have loved you with all the love I am capable of giving, and I will always love you. I love him, not because I have cared

## A WOMAN OF UNCERTAIN AGE

---

for him since he was born, but because the best part of you lives in him. I took him partly because I thought it might give me more power to bring you back. Now I must give you up, but I want to keep the little baby and raise him with my own children and give him all in life that you could never give him. I will prove to you how much I love you in him."

The Boy seemed deeply touched. His heart was filled with a greater love for her.

"So you love this little child better than you love me? He has taken my place in your heart. I am indeed jealous—yes, jealous of my own child. I could never love him if I thought he had come between you and me."

"Ah, Canning, you must be serious. You are no longer a boy. You are a man now and you must surely feel some responsibility on account of this little child. We must think only of your boy and his future. You must begin to do something in the world that will make him proud of you. I

## A WOMAN OF UNCERTAIN AGE

---

know you can do it. You know this little child must know you some day for what you really are."

She was speaking very softly now. Her face was gentle; all the lines seemed to have gone from it. But her last words were too much for him. He resolved to tell her the truth about himself. He had been criminal to carry on so long a deception with this woman, who had loved him so long and passionately, and who loved his child as one of her own. He felt satisfied that he had been loved for himself alone.

"I am not half worthy of so great a love. I have been a coward to let you entertain this delusion about myself. Can you ever forgive me?"

"I can forgive you everything, because I love you," she answered. Opening a box of cigarettes, she handed it to him. "Take a cigarette and smoke all over me, and let me forget everything but that you are here and that I love you."

"Is it quite safe?"

"I have arranged everything. We will not be disturbed here. This is my sanctum."

## A WOMAN OF UNCERTAIN AGE

---

The Boy showed an unusual desire to talk of himself, and she was afraid of doing or saying something out of harmony with his mood; and so she sat and listened. He put his arm about her and leaned his head close.

"I have been deceiving you, dearest," he said, "all this time. It was cowardly and unworthy to play with you so. But I went from home—where I am a person of some standing—in a spirit of revolt and discontent. It seemed to me that my rank stood in the way of my happiness as a man."

"Your rank?" she asked.

"Yes. I am not the simple mechanic you thought me to be. My real name is Hubert George MacDuffy Canning. I am the Earl of Clanricade."

"You—you——?" she asked breathlessly.

"Yes. The fieriest Irish blood is in my veins, the blood of fighters and knights of the olden time—loyal and brave, but fierce and ruthless. My ancestors were the Red Earls of Irish history. My wild romance is not the first that marks the his-

## A WOMAN OF UNCERTAIN AGE

---

tory of my race.” He stopped, as if lost in thought. Then he asked humbly: “And will you forgive me for my long deception of you?”

“Forgive you?” she said. “What difference can it make in my heart what you are in the world’s eyes. I love you—you!”

He told her that for generations his family were rebels and fought and died for Ireland, and for nine hundred years his family had stuck to the motto: “Ungroy, ungfoy, ungloy” (“One king, one faith, one law”). “Our coat-of-arms is supported by two battling wildcats, with one sitting on the top ready to spring. The family numbers a long list of ancient knights, who fought for country and king, and during the last two centuries many of its sons have been soldiers of fortune and have won high honors in the armies of France and Spain.

“I could tell you, my dear, of a long list of Red Earls with great honors, of murders, of sudden deaths, of marriages to heiresses, of gifts of monas-

## A WOMAN OF UNCERTAIN AGE

---

teries and lands, of titles lost and won, of rebels and hangings, of imprisonments and hasty flights, of love romances——”

She clung closer to him, saying:

“This makes no difference in my heart. Sweet Boy, if you were a king, I could not love you more.”

Lifting her face up, she gave him her lips to kiss. She did feel a great pride and satisfaction at hearing this. She imagined she could see the long line of Irish nobles and chieftains in their shining armor or silken attire. She could almost hear the clashing of their swords. These, then, were the ancestors of the “shy boy” she had loved so long.

She asked him to tell her more of himself. And so he told her of his home in Ireland; of Portumna Castle, the seat of the Earls of Clanricade, in County Galway; of the lovely land of his birth and childhood, the land that tragedy upon tragedy had filled with woe—the land with a wonderful past, rich with traditions and beauty, the land of

## A WOMAN OF UNCERTAIN AGE

---

hot-tempered and passionate natures, full of love for freedom and hatred of oppression.

After the death of his dear little mother, who had been an Englishwoman of gentle birth, he had gone to London to live in the "Albany," which for many years had been London's most noted and exclusive bachelor quarters. It was an ancient pile of stone buildings, situated near the eastern end of the northern side of Piccadilly, between Piccadilly Circus and Bond Street. It extended back to Burlington Garden, and had entrance gates from both streets. It contained about thirty suites of chambers, occupied for a term of years by men of varying degree, but who always had the qualification of plenty of money.

He had traveled much abroad, and especially in Switzerland for skating; he had always been considered a superb skater, and about the only view London women ever got of him was at the Prince's Skating Club, a rink owned by the Duchess of Bedford, which had always been attended by the

## A WOMAN OF UNCERTAIN AGE

---

smart set. He had been much sought after by women, and particularly by mothers with marriageable daughters, as every one knew that he belonged to one of Ireland's oldest and wealthiest families. It was this that had made him afraid. He had always wished to be loved for himself alone, and not for his wealth or position. It was this that had first prompted him to come to America and masquerade as a chauffeur, and it had been delightful sport at first. She knew well what had followed. His position in her house had been a trying one. At times, he had felt that he must escape from it, and finally the affair with the girl had taken him away.

Taking her in his arms, he told her he had come back only for her; that he would give anything on earth to love her openly and freely.

## CHAPTER XII

AT that moment they heard a murmured exclamation, and, looking around, saw Captain Stewart standing in the door. He was holding the portières with both hands to support himself. The Woman threw herself at his feet, as he staggered into a chair. Like a child making a confession, she sobbed:

“Oh, my husband, forgive me! I would not wilfully have hurt your heart, and I know you heard.”

The husband pale as death, motioned for Canning to leave the room, which he did, looking with longing entreaty at the Woman.

“Yes, yes, Isabelle, I know,” Captain Stewart said slowly. “I have heard all, though I guessed it long ago. I felt sure this would come sooner or later. I am sorry, but I have no reproaches

## A WOMAN OF UNCERTAIN AGE

---

for you—now. You have been a good and faithful mother, at least. Death is upon me, and its no time for anger. I have known I did not fill your life, but I have tried hard to make up in other ways. But this had to come—this passion that rules the world."

She was sobbing piteously.

"Yes, dear Tom, you have always been good to me, and you have always filled my life in every way but one. I have always been proud of you—proud to know that I had the grandest man on earth for my husband and the father of my children. I have never wanted to lose you, but I was too much alone; my nature could not bear it. I tried hard to be good, to fight it down, this devil in me; I hated myself for it, but I couldn't control it. I kept a long while the secret of love to myself, resolved to fight it down, and I did fight against it. Oh, believe me, dear Tom, I did; but I found such tranquillity and contentment in my love for him. . . . I needed him every day of

## A WOMAN OF UNCERTAIN AGE

---

my life. I needed his presence in my heart; I found I could not live any longer without him. I haven't seen him for long, and I had to see him, so I sent for him and he came at my request. Don't blame him; he went away and we tried to forget, but he was an absolute necessity to my living."

He touched her hair gently; great tears rolled down his cheeks, and his voice was choked.

"I understand . . . I understand. It is the most natural thing in the world for a healthy woman like you. You have given me many heart-aches, Isabelle, but you have never bored me, and I believe you could not have been led astray except by your heart. I used to watch closely your manner when you were with him. I felt he loved you passionately and that you were happier when he was near. I had learned he was the Earl of Clanricade, and I thought you knew it. At times it seemed too much for me and I felt tempted to kill him. But I knew that the hand of death was upon me. I knew that I had always asked of you

## A WOMAN OF UNCERTAIN AGE

---

what I could not give. It was not in your power nor mine."

He sank back in his chair and tried to speak. A gray pallor swept over his face. The excitement had been too much for him.

The Woman quickly summoned the doctor and nurse.

"Don't be alarmed, Mrs. Stewart," said the doctor. "He will soon recover—temporarily. He is coming back already."

Just then a maid appeared at the door, saying: "Miss Belle is trying on her new party gown, and if you are able she would like to come in."

The doctor shook his head disapprovingly, but the Captain heeded him not.

"Tell her to come in. Of course, tell her to come. God bless her! Who knows? I may never see her again."

The Woman withdrew to the curtained enclosure of the window, as she did not feel equal to the meeting. A beautiful girl entered, wearing her

## A WOMAN OF UNCERTAIN AGE

---

first low-necked party gown—a radiant vision in all her girlishness. She seemed a little self-conscious at first, but at the sight of her father, reclining in the big arm-chair, with his pale face showing so plainly his great suffering, she went over to him and clasped her arms about his neck.

“Mother said you wanted to see me in my new party gown. Dear old daddy, I am so sorry you are ill. I don’t really think I should go to the party to-night. Should I not stay at home, when you are so ill?”

“Go, my child; I’m all right—I’m not ill. The old machine seems just a little broken down, that’s all. Never mind me. Let us talk about your first party; let me look at your new dress.”

She walked back and forth before him.

“How do you like me, daddy dear? Do you like the low neck? Isn’t it a dear gown? It cost a lot of money. Mother said altogether too much for a slip of a girl like me. Don’t you like it? Is it too low? Mother thinks so, and was furious

## A WOMAN OF UNCERTAIN AGE

---

at the dressmaker. She told her she did not care if women wished to make exhibits of themselves, but she thought it was wrong to make a young girl's dress too low. She said their necks were sacred, or something like that, so madame just put all this tulle in it. Oh, I love the tulle, don't you? It is so soft and pretty."

"Yes, little daughter; I love everything you have."

"And you are sure, daddy, you would not rather I'd stay home with you to-night? This is only just a little party, you know. I don't care very much for it. I would much rather stay home with you, dear daddy."

"Only a little party, and this gorgeous gown—not for worlds, my child, not for worlds. My little girl must go and enjoy herself, have lots of partners and dance a great deal. You will turn some young fellow's head, and set many hearts beating to-night."

"Oh, daddy, do you think so, do you think I

## A WOMAN OF UNCERTAIN AGE

---

will?" kissing him. "Oh, I wish you could go and see me do it."

Taking her hands tenderly in his, he said:

"Daddy wants to tell you something, my little girl. Take care how you choose your life partner. You will have plenty to choose from, and don't be in a hurry. Look him over very carefully, because all your future happiness depends upon your marriage with the right man, the one you can love always. Be sure he has a good, full, open eye that can look straight into yours. See that he has a good grip of the hand and that he is firm and strong. Don't marry a bald-headed man, even though you love him. You are a girl with your mother's temperament and could never love such a one for life. Above all things, my little one, don't marry a man much older than yourself. Such marriages are always failures."

"Oh, I don't know," she said. "You are lots older than mother, and see how happy you and mother have always been."

"Yes; but we are exceptions, my dear. If you are

## A WOMAN OF UNCERTAIN AGE

---

happy in your love. That is all there is in life, after all."

Seeing the doctor motion her to go, the girl rose quietly. "I must go now. Mother said I should only stay five minutes."

The father held her hands, reluctant to have her leave him. Kissing him good-by, she drew herself gently away and left the room.

He grew fainter, and the doctor called Mrs. Stewart. Rising and staggering as she came toward him, he murmured:

"Let him come in—let him come in."

He struggled to say more.

His wife laid her hand on his shoulder, bending her head to catch what he said. As he finished whispering to her, an expression of great relief, followed by a look of intense agony. The doctor led him back to the chair, and the Woman fell at his feet sobbing:

"He is dead! I have killed him; I have broken his heart! I couldn't have conceived of such generosity, such grandeur in a man; he was generous to a fault."

## CHAPTER XIII

SOCIETY, or a part of it, wondered at the sudden and unexpected death of Captain Stewart. Guarda-crele had been closed, and the family was at the town house. A great shadow had fallen over the household. The Woman would see no one but her children and Mrs. Livingston, who was her constant companion and only comforter.

Of course, tongues were busily wagging as to Captain Stewart's death. It was rumored that it had been caused by the knowledge that his daughter Belle had fallen in love with her mother's chauffeur. After an absence of some months the young man had returned to renew his suit, and the anxiety had been too much for the old man in his failing health. It was said that he had finally consented to his daughter marrying him and had given them both his blessing.

## A WOMAN OF UNCERTAIN AGE

---

Knowing his pride and his aspirations for his children, their friends understood what this must have cost him. No wonder the shock had killed him, but then the girl was so like her mother—what more could have been expected of her? The mother had always caused the Captain endless anxiety, though the two seemed to be happy in spite of all. It was said that she had been only fifteen when Captain Stewart brought her to New York as his bride, but Southern girls mature and marry at an earlier age than their Northern sisters. She was soon recognized as of an unusual type, and many of the younger set were jealous of her, because she was much sought after and admired by men. She liked it, as most women do, but it did not spoil her in the least. Now that this sorrow had come into her life, her friends expressed a deep sympathy. They thought it a pity that her husband had made it harder for her by giving his consent to such a foolish marriage, and believed that the wise mother had made a final effort to

## A WOMAN OF UNCERTAIN AGE

---

prevent its consummation by sending her daughter to a convent.

The Woman was most wretched. How far had her intimacy with the Boy been responsible for her husband's death? He had failed to make her happy; her life with him had been an absolute failure. Yet she believed that he had loved her more than any man would ever love her again. He had even loved her impetuousness, and now her foolish passion had put an end to all possibility of quiet content.

Her heart was filled with a sickening sense of loss and despair. She was ashamed of her great weakness. She wept piteously, yet felt that all the tears she could shed would never efface her husband's image from her heart. In the midst of her tears, a tender rush of passion, that could not be denied, thrilled her. The knowledge came to her that she had been loved as she had always longed to be. However mad and foolish had been her actions, she was conscious of a deep pride in having

## A WOMAN OF UNCERTAIN AGE

---

found in the Boy the realization of her ideal. She could not but feel that fate had intended him for her. She could not have gone to eternity without having known the bliss of loving.

The Woman had not seen the Boy since the night of her husband's death. He had come back to town with the house servants, and was acting in his old capacity as chauffeur. This surprised and grieved her. For days she struggled with two inclinations, and finally decided she would send him away forever. She carefully planned everything in her mind, only waiting till she should be sufficiently recovered and have the courage to see him. She made several attempts to carry out her plans, but was unequal to the task, as grieving had completely prostrated her.

Finding the situation unbearable, feeling that she must put an end to it as quickly as possible, she sent for the Boy to come to her one evening. She was dressed in a simple black gown, and looked very pale and haggard. Her beautiful eyes were

## A WOMAN OF UNCERTAIN AGE

---

dimmed by excessive weeping. She lay, propped up with cushions, on a couch before the fire. Shortly before the time she had appointed for his coming, she caught a glimpse of herself in a mirror. Pinching her cheeks to bring back the color, she exclaimed:

"Oh, I am a fright. I must not let him remember me like this."

She went to her dressing-room and selected a lace negligee, which she slipped on hurriedly. Then she arranged her hair more becomingly, trying to make herself a little more attractive.

"This may make it harder for him if he really cares."

She put on a little rouge, viewed herself again in the cheval glass, and murmured to her reflection:

"Oh, you poor, foolish old thing! But this is the last time, and could not let him remember you like that."

She could not help thinking of that night when

## A WOMAN OF UNCERTAIN AGE

---

she had been so disappointed at his not coming. She had suffered then. She suffered now, but it was different.

The refrain of "My Rosary" was running through her mind:

"The hours I spend with thee, dear heart,  
Are as a string of pearls to me;  
I count them over, every one apart. . . ."

She would have sung it if she had the heart. The words expressed so perfectly the sentiments of her heart to-night.

The Boy came in, looking very pale and showing signs of suffering. He was in black, even a black band on his sleeve. She was greatly touched, for in her heart she felt he had come back to be near her and to help her feel her sorrow less, or perhaps it was to help her hide their guilt from the world. At any rate, it was sweet of him to do it; but she could not permit him to stay.

## A WOMAN OF UNCERTAIN AGE

---

"Come in, Canning," she said, giving him her hand. "Come and sit here."

The Boy took her hand tenderly and caressingly. She drew it back quickly.

"Oh, why did you come here dressed as a chauffeur? I cannot stand it, now that I know who you are."

"It was to be near you, my dear one. It was the only way I could come safely, and I wanted to be near you. I want to comfort you."

Shaking her head, she said:

"No, it cannot be, my dear Boy. It is all over between us. I cannot bear it. You see what we have done by our folly. We broke the kindest heart in the world. Oh, the shame of it all! It is that last kindly blow that is killing me. I have loved you dearly, and I still love you, but we must part. You must go away to-night."

He told her that he could not; that he loved her and wanted to stay and marry her as soon as propriety would permit; that then they could go

## A WOMAN OF UNCERTAIN AGE

---

to his old home in Ireland, where nobody would know; where they would always love and be happy.

She heard him through.

"It sounds delightful, but it is impossible. Every one thinks that you are in love with my daughter, that her father gave his consent, and that the blow caused his death. What a blessing that mistake is! I have sent Belle away to keep the truth hidden. I cannot keep you here, as much as I would love it. Why, the very thought of your being near has been a comfort to me, but I don't deserve this comfort, or any other, and I must let you go. It would all come out if you stayed here, and then I should lose the love and respect of my children, and I could not bear that. I will tell you what we will do. I will give you your boy —yes, the darling little 'pink baby' that I love. You can take him back and marry the girl. I lied to you, sweetheart. She is not dead, but is at her home in England. She believes her baby dead. Her aunt told her it had died while she was so

## A WOMAN OF UNCERTAIN AGE

---

ill. Oh, forgive me! I deceived you because I loved you. You will forgive me, Canning? I did not want to do you an injustice, but I loved you and I love your boy. I would have kept him, as I told you; but now that I know who you are, you can do all that I would and more. I am sorry you came into my life, but you have made me happy. I have learned what a great love is, but I must give you up."

He told her that he loved her too much and could not give her up. He did not want the girl or the baby. It was herself he wanted.

"Hush! hush!" she said, laying her hand over his mouth. "Yes, yes, you do want her. She is so young and sweet, just the kind of a girl to make you happy."

He gently drew her to him, softly kissing her great blue eyes until they closed as if in sleep. Then he fiercely sought her red lips, which he believed were waiting soft and passive for his caresses. Her head fell back upon his arm in a languorous, half-conscious surrender.

## A WOMAN OF UNCERTAIN AGE

---

This boy was a demon at times, and she loved it in him. She loved to resist him, then yield herself to him like this.

"You won't send me away, will you? You know you cannot live without me," he whispered.

Ah, the lying logic of a soul-kiss is irresistible. She forgot all her good resolutions. It was with a great effort that she regained her self-control. Tearing herself from him, she said, with a tremor in her voice:

"You could not love me for long. I couldn't keep my youth always. I would have to be powdering and painting my face, trying to hide my wrinkles, dyeing my hair, and pretending to be young to keep you. And then, in the end, the face of some young girl would take you from me. No, I must not even think of keeping you. I must retire to respectable motherhood and be content with my gray hair and my wrinkles when they come. Some day I shall have served my time of attractiveness. I have had much admiration in

## A WOMAN OF UNCERTAIN AGE

---

my life, and I have liked it. I have been loved and admired by many, my temptations have been great, but you are the only sweetheart I have ever had, and more is the pity that I should have fallen in love with a mere boy."

"Then you are afraid to trust yourself to me because I am young. I am not a boy. I am a man. Haven't I proven to you that I am a man?"

"Yes, of course you have. But you are so young in years and in your experience with women. Don't make it harder for me. It cannot be. I love you with all my heart, but I must let you go—before it is too late."

He pleaded with her to let him stay, promising to do anything and everything—to remain her chauffeur and live with the servants in the house, so that nobody could ever suspect the truth.

"No, no, I cannot, and I will not permit it."

"Well, then, I am sorry that I am not the poor boy that you loved. I am sorry that I told you the truth."

## A WOMAN OF UNCERTAIN AGE

---

Still he was happy in the thought that she had loved him for himself alone.

"You know I can be of no further benefit to you; only a shameful drawback, now. Don't make it harder for me to give you up. It seems the only thing I can do. I must——"

The voice of a child was heard calling:

"Oh, mother, sweetheart mother, come quick!"

Her little son, Tommy, burst into the room, all excited and weeping.

"Sweetheart mother, somebody's going to take away 'pink baby.' Nurse says you know; you *don't* know, *do* you? You wouldn't let any one take him?"

The child had come close to his mother's side, and laid his little head on her breast. Kissing the child's head, she answered:

"Yes, my darling, mother knows. We all love him, but he is not ours, dear; we have kept him a long time, but he belongs to some one else who loves him too, and wants him, and we must let him go."

## A WOMAN OF UNCERTAIN AGE

---

She choked and could say no more.

The child ran to the Boy, climbing upon his knee and throwing his arms about his neck.

"You won't let them take him, will you, Canning? I haven't any papa—I only have mother and you to love me, and now I won't have my little brother."

The mother could not endure seeing her child plead for this baby that she loved so well, and his affection for the Boy. It seemed like tearing her heart out to send him away. After all, if her child loved him and would accept him, why should she not marry him? Was it not the fear of losing the love of this little child that was making her send him away? In her heart she did not want him to go, but would it be safe to keep them both? If her child did love him . . . Her mind was made up in a moment.

She left her son and the Boy, went to the nursery and told the nurse that the baby would not go.

## A WOMAN OF UNCERTAIN AGE

---

The child was still on the Boy's lap, stroking his face, and pleading with him:

"You won't let them take the little baby? You love him, too? You told me so yesterday."

"No, dear little man, I would never willingly take him away. I want you to keep him always, but your mother wishes me to go and I fear I will have to go and take him."

"Why, Canning, you are crying! And is my mother going to send you away, too? Oh, I don't believe that."

Getting down, he looked cautiously at the nursery door, then climbing back on the Boy's knee, he whispered:

"H-u-s-h! I want to tell you something, Canning. Do you know my mother loves you?"

"Oh, Tommy, shame on you!"

"Oh, no shame about it; I guess I know."

He ran to the chiffonier and took the little brown cap out of the drawer.

"See, it's your little old cap. Mother has al-

## A WOMAN OF UNCERTAIN AGE

---

ways kept it here, and she kisses it every day, and sometimes she cries and takes it to bed with her. Last night I saw her get up and go to the drawer for it and take it to bed with her. I heard her crying awfully hard. I covered up my head; I was afraid I would cry, too. After mother went to sleep, I got up and looked and she had it right here on her breast, hugged up tight. I kissed her very softly. She looked so sweet and happy when she was sleeping. And I pulled the little cap away gently and put it under her pillow, so no one would see it."

"Tommy, little man, you are full of imagination."

"Oh, you hush right up, Canning; I know better. I guess I know what love is," pulling a little cap from his blouse. "See, I have a cap, too. It's Jamie's, and I have had it a long time. Jamie has moved away, you know, and I keep the little cap because it's all I have of her, and I love her."

He burst into tears and laid his head on the Boy's shoulder.

## A WOMAN OF UNCERTAIN AGE

---

The Boy's heart was filled with love and pity for this child-man. It was so easy to love him—he was so like his mother. A new thought struck him. Might he not win the mother through this child? If the child loved him and would accept him, he would try this means. He could not and would not give her up as long as there seemed a single hope left him. All through his childhood and golden youth, the Earl of Clanricade had never met with any opposition to his wishes. He had reigned as a king at home; no one had ever curbed his will. Naturally, he grew up not a little selfish and conceited. He had always known that nature had endowed him over and above others with good looks, noble birth and wealth. . . .

He held the child close in his arms, gently patting his little head.

The Woman came in with a faltering step. One look at the pained expression of her face and the Boy realized that she had heard all that the child had said. He led the little fellow to the

## A WOMAN OF UNCERTAIN AGE

---

nursery door, telling him to run and play, and maybe he would take him for a drive after a while, when they would talk things over again.

He longed to gather the Woman in his arms and run away with her.

"I am sorry you heard," he said. "I see it has hurt you, but don't you see that the child loves me? Won't you marry me—go away with me?"

The Woman had not heard his words. She sank exhausted in a chair. A strange feeling came over her—was it death, she wondered. If so, she felt she would welcome death. Then she felt some one stroke her forehead and she smelt the fascinating odor of cigarettes. • • •

## CHAPTER XIV.

THE Woman had been very ill for weeks. The fear that her little son had discovered her folly seemed sapping her life. How much did he know? The thought that her own deceit and weakness had caused the child to conceal something from her was agonizing. It might be possible that she had not only ruined him for life, but lost his love and respect.

Had he seen anything more than the little brown cap? It was this anxiety that caused her illness and made her heart sick. She would question him and find out what he really knew. There would be nothing in life to live for if this little child knew her for what she had been.

She tried to bring herself to talk to him, but her courage failed. She could only kiss him and cry. She imagined that he was not the same.

## A WOMAN OF UNCERTAIN AGE

---

Then she would reason that he was too young to realize what it meant to have such a mother. She feared, however, that when he grew up he would understand and be ashamed of her and hate her. She was filled with remorse. She must do something. She would give up the Boy, but she had resolved to do that in any event. . . .

She would rather the whole world knew than her little son, whose love and respect she needed so much. She had been too careless of her children in her wild passion. Would she not be justified in marrying the Boy to redeem herself in the eyes of her children? But could she hope to keep him? If he should soon tire of her and cease to love her, would it not break her heart and kill her pride? Yet this was the punishment that she deserved.

She sent for her little son in great fear. He came with a pleased expression on his face, and climbing on the bed he kissed her, saying:

"Oh, sweetheart mother, you don't know how

## A WOMAN OF UNCERTAIN AGE

---

sorry I am I made you sick because I hid Jamie's cap from you. I would have told you all about it, but when I saw you kissing Canning's cap and you didn't tell papa, I asked papa one day——”

The Woman's heart nearly stopped beating.

“You asked your father!” she interrupted.  
“And what did he say?”

“I asked him if he knew you loved Canning. He asked me how I knew. I told him you kept his little brown cap and kissed it, and sometimes you took it to bed with you. He said: ‘Yes, my boy, I know.’ And I saw tears in father's eyes. Then I thought it was all right to hide the cap, because I loved Jamie. I have told you all about it; I am sorry I deceived you, and I won't do it any more. I am glad you love Canning. I felt bad about it at first, because I thought you couldn't love papa and me so much, but I know better now, for I love Jamie and I love her little cap, and I love you, sweetheart mother, and I love Canning, too. I hope I will grow up to be such a nice fellow as he is.”

## A WOMAN OF UNCERTAIN AGE

---

The mother could bear no more. She pressed the child to her heart, and smothered the rest of his speech with kisses. So he, too, this child, had learned that love multiplied in giving. He had seen nothing but her love for the little brown cap. That had been enough.

When the child had gone, the Boy came to her, fearing she had requested him to come for the last time. He wanted to marry her, to take her away, and make her happy forever. He could tell her this all over again, but would she listen? He believed it would have been different had the child not seen his cap.

It was bliss to the Boy to see this woman he loved in bed. She was pale when he came, but his presence soon brought the color back to her cheeks. Her pretty hair fell over the pillow. The rays of sunlight streaming in at the windows fell and faded upon the soft silken quilt covering her. He imagined pranks of love playing about her bed. A pretty negligée hung on the cheval glass, and

## A WOMAN OF UNCERTAIN AGE

---

her dainty slippers were by the bed. The Boy's pleasure in watching the woman he loved was indescribable. There seemed a whole romance to him in her negligee and her slippers.

Before he came in the woman's expression was painful, indeed. One might have read despair in it, or an inner conflict even more terrible than remorse. It was an utter helplessness, but with his coming her whole being had changed. What was this great power the Boy seemed to have over her? She put out her arms to him.

"Oh, Canning, dear, I am so happy. Come closer and kiss me."

Drawing him down to her, she took his face in her hands and kissed him tenderly. She told him she was happy because her little son knew only about the cap.

"Now, you must be good and go away quickly, lest the child see something that would make him ashamed of me."

The Boy fell on his knees by her bedside. After

## A WOMAN OF UNCERTAIN AGE

---

much pleading with her to allow him to remain, he buried his face in her neck—he knew her weakness. She held him close. She had been so long without his caresses. She felt she would willingly give up everything for him at that moment. She asked him to take her out of bed, telling him she was so tired of lying there. He drew the covers back and lifted her up gently, then slipped her feet into the tiny, brocaded slippers. Taking the negligee from the cheval glass, he put it on her, then carried her to a big arm-chair before the fire. There was a delicate fragrance about her that intoxicated him.

"Thank you, dear," she said, laying her head back in his arms, and giving her lips to him in a long, sweet, passionate kiss. "You are so dear. How am I ever going to give you up?"

The Boy sat at her feet, kissing her arms and the lace on her sleeves. Pleadingly he said:

"You will not send me away. You do love me; you will never be able to live without me. Come,

## A WOMAN OF UNCERTAIN AGE

---

dearest, promise that you will marry me. You are free to do as you like, but we have so long been united in love."

"Yes, yes, my darling, I do love you, but I must give you up before it is too late. I could never marry you. That would spoil it all. As lovers we have been happy, but if we were married it would be the same old story. The one who loves most is always tyrannized over, and, what is worse, is too soon neglected. I believe love has more power to keep our hearts together than marriage would ever have, as happiness under difficulties is always more lasting and delightful. If we were married I would be yours forever, and you would soon be careless of me. I could never bear it. No, I want to remember you as you are."

She gave him another long kiss, then, pushing him from her, said, making a great effort to be cheerful:

"You must be good and go away. If you love me, you will do as I wish."

## A WOMAN OF UNCERTAIN AGE

---

He begged and pleaded to remain, but without effect. At last he promised to go if she would keep his child and allow him to come and see it at times. Knowing her nature so well, he felt sure of winning her back. He was certain she would not let him stay away for long. . . .

That night he left the house, the servants believing he had been dismissed on account of some impertinence.

## CHAPTER XV.

THE Boy's passionate letters were life to the Woman. Some mornings she would get up so full of the thought of him that she would write him to come to her, that she could not live another day, not even another hour, without him; she would promise to give herself up wholly to the bliss of loving him; but these letters would be destroyed before they were posted.

Then came days and weeks of loneliness—loneliness with all the tortures on earth, until life seemed unbearable to the Woman. She did everything to fill up the interminable hours, fearing to stop to think. Yet she experienced a glow of satisfaction at having sent the Boy away. She realized that her life was broken, though she was making a great struggle to fight bravely. Little by little her crushed spirit seemed to be lifted. The little brown cap was again her only comfort.

## A WOMAN OF UNCERTAIN AGE

---

This poor, foolish woman, whose soul was yet great enough to bring the infinite into love, was as uncommon in her passion as in all else. Sometimes she would write him pages and pages of tender love, blotting every page with her tears, telling him to write her every day and many times a day, as it was her only pleasure.

"I must deny myself the joy of ever seeing you again, but your letters are so full of soul; they inspire me. They fill me with passion; they speak so eloquently of your impatient and tender love. You alone can comfort me, so tell me every day and every hour of the day that you still love me. I feel I cannot exist unless you do."

What was he to do? As a man always desires a thing more earnestly because it is hard to get, so he continued to worship her and long to possess her. More than ever, he flattered himself that he was the only man who could ever receive the full measure of her love. He knew she wanted him, and he was impatiently waiting for her to bid him come.

## A WOMAN OF UNCERTAIN AGE

---

His love grew greater and stronger for the struggle of long waiting. If he had possessed all the crowns on earth, he would have gladly forfeited them for just one hour of bliss with her. But if she would not permit him to come to her, how could he find a way? He was certain that he would win her back if he could once more see her—he knew well her weakness and his power.

His patience became exhausted, and he wrote her that he had decided to go to Ireland. It was cowardly of him to play upon her feelings in this manner, but it seemed the only thing left him, and he resolved to try it. He had no intention of going—he would not for the world desert her; and of what good would his life be without her? His impulse became an inflexible resolution to possess this woman, to make her his wife in spite of every objection. He trembled at his daring as he wrote her this note:

"**MY DEAREST:** You must know that I am dying to see you. I am no longer master of my-

## A WOMAN OF UNCERTAIN AGE

---

self or of my life. My future hangs on the answer you will send me. I must have you. You have loved me and been happy with me. You have told me I satisfied your every desire, that I was your dream realized. Have you forgotten? Oh, say one word and let me come to you. I have the courage to look forward to our old age together, when we shall both have white hair, but shall always be inspired by the same old love.

"I must see you or give up all hope. Tell me I may come to you, or I will go back home to certain misery and marry the girl.

"CANNING."

The Woman read and re-read this letter of love and fevered impatience. She felt that there had been much in her life for the passing of which she was grateful, yet she was glad that it had been, because it had made her happy. The man who could so fully satisfy the soul of such a woman is found only once in a lifetime. Could anything

## A WOMAN OF UNCERTAIN AGE

---

so strong, so deep, so true, be immoral, after all? Her desire for the Boy had increased with every obstacle that interposed itself, and was she not free to give her love to him? She could never feel secure from the Boy, but in her heart she did not want to be secure from him. What would give her courage? Would love give her the courage she needed? Would love keep her right? Of one thing she was certain: she would always love him. Doubtless, he would soon forget—he was a man; but the heart of the Woman who had inspired this great love was different. She could look over the whole course of their love, backward into the past, forward into the future, and she knew well the price she must pay for the joy and bliss of keeping him.

But her pride and mother-love seemed to be more faithful than her love of him. As she read his letter, she realized that the time had come to choose, and to choose quickly, between her pleasure and her future happiness and her peace of



## A WOMAN OF UNCERTAIN AGE

---

mind. Her answer was promptly sent. Brief and tear-stained, in it could be read the heart of the Woman:

"**M**Y DEAR LITTLE BROWN SWEETHEART: Good-by, and blessings on you for the happiness you have given me. I will try to live and be happy with the gladness you have poured into my soul. I have loved you with all the love and passion in me. You are the dearest, sweetest thing that has ever come into my life, but I must give you up before it is too late.

"**I**SABELLE."

The Boy was in his rooms at the Plaza when her answer reached him. So she had chosen. He regretted that he had not been her final choice; still, there was the tie of the child left—his child, whom she loved so dearly. He believed that she would soon send for him; that she could not live her life without him. He sat for some time puffing

## A WOMAN OF UNCERTAIN AGE

---

away at cigarette after cigarette and pondering over all that had occurred in the past months.

He caught the strains of the orchestra playing downstairs. They were playing something familiar; he could not place it precisely, but he had heard her sing it. She had always sung it in such a fascinating, tantalizing way, as though she liked the sentiment. He never had liked it, but to-night it seemed a bit comforting. They were playing the refrain now; he recalled a few of the words:

"A woman is only a woman,  
But a good cigar is a smoke."

His pride was hurt. Trying to pull himself together, he said:

"This is hell, but a man never gives up hoping."

He sailed with Lord Anthony on Saturday. Maybe it was a mere episode to the Boy—it was a sacrament to the Woman.

## CHAPTER XVI

THE ailing condition of the Woman was evident, and her many sleepless nights were beginning to tell on her. She awoke late Sunday morning, giving herself up to the thoughts of the Boy. She wondered if he had sailed the day before, as he had threatened to do. She thought if he had gone her soul must die, though her body would continue to live on. Life without him would be worse than death. There would be nothing worth while left to live for.

Her breakfast had been brought to her bed, also the morning paper. As she unfolded its pages, she caught sight of a picture of the Earl of Clanricade, followed by these sensational headlines:

## A WOMAN OF UNCERTAIN AGE

---

### THE EARL OF CLANRICADE, THE HATED IRISH PEER, SAILED YES- TERDAY AFTER A ROMANTIC LOVE AFFAIR

---

*Masquerading as a Chauffeur in Prominent Family  
of the Four Hundred. Was he in Love  
with Mother or Daughter?*

---

Society has just awakened to the fact that not long ago an event happened which would have caused one of the greatest social scandals if a certain pleasant little episode—connected with a Renault runabout, in which a prominent society leader figured—had found its way into print. But there are gossips in the best regulated clubs, and for some time the wonder has been growing as to how it would all end.

For the thousandth time, the eldest of Ireland's greatest families has figured in another love romance—this time with a well-known American

## A WOMAN OF UNCERTAIN AGE

---

woman—and it has threatened to have a most tragic ending.

It was said that the shy Earl had come over here to escape the mothers of marriageable daughters, because his greatest hobby had always been to be loved for himself alone, and not for his fortune and position in life.

"All the world loves a lover," be he old or young, but especially one like this young Earl, who enjoyed intrigue and who could humiliate the pride of generations in order to become a flunky in the home of the woman he loved.

After months and months of waiting and careful planning, he had won her heart.

Who with real red blood in his veins would exchange this romantic Earl for the mild, conventional society lover?

Many women in the woman's set would gladly have ridden through the darkness, just as she had, with death and the police at their heels, and scandal awaiting her at home, but with hearts full of love.

## A WOMAN OF UNCERTAIN AGE

---

The history of the Earl's ancient family is intensely interesting. It combines honor and bravery, while romantic love marriages have long been the characteristics of Clanricardeism. They were all of the same handsome, romantic, fighting type; their enthusiasm never waning. They never lacked imagination and adventure, which no doubt has been the cause of their enchanting so many women for centuries—queens and plebeians alike.

This society queen's life has been much changed and therefore commented on of late. Though she has always had more admirers than any woman in her set, her Earl chauffeur, who ran her motor car like a demon, seemed the only one who found favor in her eyes. She has lost all interest in society, and lives in seclusion.

The Woman could read no more. A sharp pang shot through her—she was blinded. She closed her eyes for a few moments and lay quite still on her pillow. She was too much stunned for tears.

## A WOMAN OF UNCERTAIN AGE

---

She was filled with fear and shame at what she had read. Though her name was not mentioned, she knew that certain members of her set would put two and two together, and that the truth must sooner or later leak out. She only thought now of some means of hiding it from her curious friends. At least she must try for her children's sake.

Gradually she recovered herself; the normal woman came back. She sat up and absent-mindedly began to rearrange her hair. Her eyes, which had been so reddened and dimmed by excessive weeping, recovered a little of their old-time sparkle. She clasped her trembling hands, trying to compose herself.

The Woman had been awakened to the full extent of her present danger. She resolved to let her daily life go on as though nothing had happened. All her ingenuity and tact must be exercised to make the best of the situation. In the absorbed and prolonged planning, she had not one

## A WOMAN OF UNCERTAIN AGE

---

single thought for the Boy—only regrets and fears filled her heart now.

The door opened softly and Mrs. Livingston entered, seemingly much agitated.

"Good-morning, Isabelle; I hope I haven't disturbed you. How are you this morning?"

"Oh, I am miserable, Aunt." Extending the paper, she asked: "Have you seen this?"

"Yes, I have, and it is horrible. How much of it is true, Isabelle?"

"All of it," she said frankly; "and more."

"Oh, Isabelle, for shame! I couldn't have believed there was so much wickedness in you."

"It wasn't all wickedness, Aunt."

After making a brief confession, the Woman was overcome with tears. A short pause followed. Both women were thinking what would be the best thing to do to put matters seemingly right in the eyes of the world. They talked it all over quietly and decided to play their parts.

From this time on, the Woman made a great

## A WOMAN OF UNCERTAIN AGE

---

effort to look happy and unconcerned before her servants and the friends who were permitted to see her, most of whom she received informally in her boudoir. She made a great effort to be gay. With all tact and prudence she tried to make everybody who came feel that there had been no change in her life, save for the sad and sudden death of her husband, which accounted for any indisposition she might have toward society and her world.

This life of effort continued, and by degrees the Boy had apparently passed out of her life. Mrs. Livingston was with her a great deal, always trying to give her courage.

The Woman's condition had excited a sort of cruel compassion and morbid curiosity. The cause of her ill-health was no longer a secret. It was now spoken of among women in confidential whispers.

Her health declined daily. She grew so weak that she could hardly walk about her room, but in her marvelous luxury she looked more like an

## A WOMAN OF UNCERTAIN AGE

---

indolent queen than an invalid. Some women who called were delighted at the sad, fragile looks of the Woman, who had so long been their rival. They sent her flowers, brought her small news of the day, and kept her informed as to all the gossip that filled their lives.

The Woman was like some blighted flower, yet she continued to keep up the parade of quiet content, while her face grew wan with secret torture. If her heart had been sounded to its very depths, her closely hidden wretchedness would have excited great sympathy.

She was dominated by the determination to have the child. "Would that not satisfy some for having lost the Boy?"

Her wild eagerness deepened as the days went by. She felt she would glorify in the physical anguish—she would willingly pass through purgatorial fires to attain the paradise of having the child—his child.

When she slept she now dreamed the little, warm

## A WOMAN OF UNCERTAIN AGE

---

nursing baby was at her breast. In her imagination she soothed its thin, wailing cries. Then she would awaken with a feeling of self-pity at the thought of such a foolish, daring, unpracticable thing.

The whole winter, with the season's festivities about her, she had struggled long and hard with herself, but now another spring had come. All the doctor's prescriptions had failed to bring back the slightest degree of her old health. Finally, a specialist was called, who told her many things which she already knew, and predicted improved health soon. In her heart she had little faith in these learned arguments, based on theory. Feeling life had lost all its sweetness, she looked forward to death alone as a fitting close of her drama. A change of air and scenery was advised, but was she not too weak and miserable to undertake the trip?

Her face suddenly assumed a different expression—it was an expression of resignation, tinged

## A WOMAN OF UNCERTAIN AGE

---

with disappointment, and revealed all the delicacy of her beautiful soul. She seemed suddenly transformed. . . .

Every thought of the Woman now followed her lover. She knew well what would bring back the roses to her cheeks. The joy of loving had penetrated her soul. . . .

The facts were strange and wonderful enough, but her determination was stronger. Had she not given herself a fair trial, and had it not made a complete wreck of her life? The lack of love had brought only misery, so she frankly began to put down her burden and to let her love of the Boy master her. She came to believe that many people love who do not marry, but more are married who do not love. Then she made her own laws for love, and each day brought her nearer to the decision that the only true life for her was a life of love, free from artificialities. Yet she asked herself whether there could be any lasting peace and comfort in such a life?

## A WOMAN OF UNCERTAIN AGE

---

Another week passed. She had grown absolutely indifferent as to what people thought. She knew that the eyes of the world were upon her, and she wanted more and more every day to escape from it. She let her imagination run free as to just how she would arrange her future life. She felt life as something true and positive now, and held fast to this one reality that, lacking love, she was the most miserable woman on earth. She only feared that a life of love could not last for long, and fully realized that the thing which had given her the greatest happiness might also give her the greatest grief.

She decided to go to him, and if she failed to keep him, or he did not make her happy, to try the last resort—death. The storm of suffering had been too great to endure.

She wrote the Boy a long letter. When she had finished it, she ground her teeth with the violent emotions which seemed to be tearing her heart to pieces. Then the tension snapped and she col-

## A WOMAN OF UNCERTAIN AGE

---

lapsed in a nervous convulsion. When she recovered, her resolution was strong. All Mrs. Livingston's pleadings were in vain.

"No; I have tried long and earnestly. It is no use," she would answer to one and all arguments. "When a woman has once strayed from the conventional path of life, it is hard to go back. I thought I could do it easily, but I can no longer deceive myself. I haven't had a single comfortable moment this whole winter. I have been filled with a wild unrest and longing. Though I am frank to tell you, Aunt, I fear a life with him will bring only unhappiness and misery in the end—yet I must have it. I must satisfy myself. This life of deception is killing me. I tell you I am going to take my children and go to England."

Mrs. Livingston, finding all her persuasions and pleading in vain, decided to accompany them, so their passage was at once engaged for the following Wednesday.

## CHAPTER XVII

THE Earl and Lord Anthony had taken up their abode, as of old, in the "Albany." The Earl had read a little and thought a great deal. He had entirely abandoned the deliberate quest of romance, but he felt that there was no man who needed understanding companionship so much as himself. Loneliness—still, stony loneliness—was written all over life. During all the dreary winter he seemed to dwell in a world alone—coming into companionship nearest with Lord Anthony, who seemed to possess the wisdom of Solomon, but was unable to fit it to the Boy's need.

In the early spring they started on an automobile tour, accompanied by a valet and mechanic. Their courier was sent ahead to plan the route and attend to necessary details. Most of the time the Boy drove the machine himself, and it was

## A WOMAN OF UNCERTAIN AGE

---

only when talking motor talk—the fastness of their runs, the roads, and the scenery—that he seemed at all like himself. Nothing seemed to satisfy him. He said he liked motoring best because he could get away from people, and from women in particular.

Lord Anthony became more and more attached to the Boy, whose lack of interest in life was indeed pathetic; and it pained him to have all their old-time friends and pleasures abandoned.

They had not been touring long, when the Boy received a package of mail, forwarded from London. As he glanced it over, his face glowed with pleasure, and Lord Anthony felt that there was a letter from the Woman. As the Boy turned over the pages of the letter, a picture fell to the floor and Lord Anthony picked it up. It was an excellent likeness of the Woman and the child he had always heard called the "pink baby," but the Woman's expression made his heart beat with a warmth he had never felt for any other woman.

## A WOMAN OF UNCERTAIN AGE

---

The poise of her head still had the same high-bred air, but there was unspeakable sadness in her eyes. Under the picture was written in her handwriting, "His father's heir," and Lord Anthony wondered not a little why she had written that. It puzzled and confused him.

The Boy suddenly became anxious to return to town. Consequently, they soon found themselves back in their bachelor apartments. Here more letters awaited him, including another one from the Woman.

A tiny envelope, addressed "Daddy," enclosed a letter from the baby boy, written by the guiding hand of the Woman. It read:

"DEAR DADDY: We are too unhappy to live away from you any longer. We are coming over to you, so be glad, because we are coming to make you happy always.

"Your little son,

"CANNING."

## A WOMAN OF UNCERTAIN AGE

---

Tears of joy filled the Boy's eyes as he read the little letter. The Woman's letter was a veritable dithyramb of love and passion:

"MY DEAREST: Believe me, I am writing from my heart, because I cannot live without you. I have tried long and earnestly, but foolish virtue and conventionality have no power over me. I am tired of being gazed at and commented on and whispered about. I tell you, little sweetheart, I am sick to death of all this shallow babbling crowd called society, which is ready to seize me at any moment and drag me into the dust.

"I am weary of thinking my loving thoughts. I know what I want; it is you, sweet boy; you in the freedom of love. I cannot bear the mask any longer.

"This is not an impulse, dear; believe me, it is the most real thing my heart has ever felt. It is that which has been stamped upon my character because of my love for you. You have inspired

## A WOMAN OF UNCERTAIN AGE

---

all my being. I love you in spite of myself. My face may grow old, but my heart never. I will always be full of love for you. I alone know how deeply I love you, how bitterly I regret you and how profoundly I suffer without you. Now be happy when I tell you I am sailing for England and you. You must arrange to see me often. I must be with you or I will die.

"I willed our separation; I quarreled with you; I was foolishly jealous of you; but I am sorry and ashamed. Forgive me. I won't quarrel with you any more. I love you with all my heart and soul. My love shall be like a religion—full of faith and truth. . . . Until we meet, one long, sweet kiss, my darling, on your brown neck.

"ISABELLE."

He read the letter several times, his face drawn and his eyes wet. The serious truth was before him. He knew what all this meant, and it made him both happy and sad. There was no denying

## A WOMAN OF UNCERTAIN AGE

---

the fact that he, too, had been most miserable without her; he knew she alone could fill the vacancy in his heart. He felt there could never be a single, irresponsible existence again; his life would always be involved in that of this woman, whose love for him seemed a sacred thing. He had found in her the infinite variety which unfailingly makes association interesting and lasting. Her moods had always filled him with a desire to understand and respond; there had always been such restful harmony between them. She had awakened his whole sleeping, selfish being into a great love, which could not be laid aside. He had too long been a prey to the passion of this woman; his soul had been led by her so long, it must be led on forever.

Lord Anthony had been watching him in silence, a sickening smile trembling on the Boy's lips. Lord Anthony knew from whom the letter was, and in his heart there was a feeling of jealousy. Laying his hand on the Boy's arm, he said:

"What is it, my boy? What's up? Tell me."

## A WOMAN OF UNCERTAIN AGE

---

The Boy did not answer for a moment. There was something terrible in his eyes. Lord Anthony watched him with interest. He inspired both awe and admiration—this handsome, full-blooded youth, who had put new life in the soul of the woman he had wanted so much. Finally, Lord Anthony dared to ask:

“Does she say she loves you?”

The Boy made no answer, but the truth was plainly written on his face.

“My boy, I will tell you what I would do. I would let the world howl and be damned. I would make short work of this. Listen to me: if that woman loved me—damn me—I would have her in spite of everything and everybody. I would run away with her; I would steal her out of a twenty-story window; I would carry her to the altar in my arms. I tell you, my boy, she is worth it.”

The Boy flushed a little with jealousy at this declaration, yet he felt glad and proud that he had been the man of her choice.

## A WOMAN OF UNCERTAIN AGE

---

"My boy, you are a coward—a damned moral coward! You should never have left her. Don't tell me she did not love you; she never would have kept you so long at her house if she had not. I suspected it from the first, and I was jealous of you, because I wanted her more than anything else on God's earth. I watched and waited, hoping something would turn up, that I could get her myself; but no—not a look or thought had she for any one after you came. You gave yourselves up to concealing the love that was so natural and perfect, and you partially succeeded. I saw you both found charm and satisfaction in the escapade. You always wore such an air of indifference toward her, and you certainly played your part well; but the whole story is out now. Why don't you go and bring her over and marry her?"

"She won't marry me; that's the worst of it. I have asked her. It was she who sent me home. You don't think for a moment that I would have left her of my own accord?"

## A WOMAN OF UNCERTAIN AGE

---

"Sure, and she will marry you, because she loves you. She only needs a little coaxing, now that she knows you are the Earl of Clanricade."

"But she knew that, and still she sent me away."

At this Lord Anthony laughed heartily.

"And you mean to tell me that she knew all the while you were the Earl of Clanricade? You young scoundrel, you did play the part well."

"Oh, no; not all the while."

The desire to confess is strong in the young, so the Boy told Lord Anthony part of the story of his experiment and banishment in order to win her love. He frankly said that he had thought he could give up the Woman easily by filling his mind with other things, by having his freedom, and taking up his position in life again. He had firmly believed he could forget it all and look upon it as a mere episode in his life.

"But I find it is no use, Anthony; it is an utter impossibility. I am always filled with longing for her. I would gladly have married her long

## A WOMAN OF UNCERTAIN AGE

---

ago. She writes me she is coming; she is on her way now, and I could not stop her, even if I wanted to."

In a few moments the Boy had given Lord Anthony a history of the woman he, too, had loved so well—the woman who for years, as he knew, had accepted uncomplainingly the disappointments of her soul. He had made it so plain, that Lord Anthony fairly felt the heart of this woman throbbing in his hands. He simply said:

"My boy, obey your instincts. The world is surely big enough to make an exception of yourself. Believe me, you will be happy with this woman if you love her."

"But I love her too much to spoil her life; she is too good a woman. I feel she could never be happy in the life she suggests in this letter."

"Remember, my boy, we are discussing the woman we both love; but her life is already spoiled—I am sure of that. She can never be happy or contented again without you and the gratification you

## A WOMAN OF UNCERTAIN AGE

---

have given her. She may not be happy with you, but she will have you sooner or later. Mark me, she will not live without you. If you love her, my advice to you is to marry her and make your position right in the eyes of the world."

## CHAPTER XVIII

THE lovers had entered the haven of love. They were again engrossed in the bliss of loving.

A villa at Hampton-on-the-Thames had been taken, and it was in this little white nest that they were trying their life together.

The Woman had playfully christened the villa "The Mausoleum of Love."

They no longer lived in continual passionate ecstasy, but rather the life of two healthy beings. They had all the society they wanted in themselves. Occasionally they went up to town to dine with Mrs. Livingston, who had taken a house in Grosvenor Square.

The Woman was always wondering how long this exquisite life would last. Her son Tommy had been sent to Eton, and her daughter Belle to an English convent. Little Canning was the only child with them.

## A WOMAN OF UNCERTAIN AGE

---

She went frequently to see her children, always returning tear-stained, and for days afterward she would be nerve-racked.

The fever of love that possessed them made the months fly away without a cloud in the blue sky under which they lived. Never before had life been so complete to the Woman. They lived together because they loved, and she believed that it was right. If they had married and lived together and not loved, would it not have been all wrong? She made this her belief and faith. A short time after they had taken up their life together, an event took place which contributed largely to their happiness—a daughter was born to them. . . .

The Woman had been very ill; there had been several doctors from town, and all said that she would die, but she surprised them by recovering. She determined to nurse this child herself, and the following months, when she nursed her infant, proved the crown of glory of their already happy existence. , , .

## A WOMAN OF UNCERTAIN AGE

---

The Boy spent all his evenings at home playing with little Canning or baby Ann, and, as the power of love developed, the Woman grew strong and robust again. For many months motherhood with all its absorbing cares and anxieties caused her to forget the outside world entirely. The more she saw of her lover the dearer he became. His presence was ever new, and she was always finding in him some undiscovered trait of character she loved. Her excessive adoration alarmed her sometimes. They delighted in their daily drives in his Isota runabout, sometimes going to Henley to dine or lunch at the Red Lion Inn, but more often it was for a short drive with little Canning held close on her lap.

Sometimes she would spend the entire evening singing to him; on other occasions she would accompany him on the piano, his voice proving a new delight to her. At still other times he would read while she embroidered some dainty garment for the baby.

## A WOMAN OF UNCERTAIN AGE

---

She was always in high spirits, and every night before they retired they would go together to the nursery to kiss the children good-night. She was devotion itself to the little ones, and it was this untiring care that made him long more every day to end this mode of life.

At times he would talk to her of when they would get married. The tears would come into her eyes and she would say:

"We are happy as we are, and that is enough. I know I am being loved as I have always wished to be. The rest let us forget."

Then he would have to take her in his arms and caress her until she was calm again.

It was not until many months of this powerful life of loving that the Boy began to reassume at times a quiet dignity. These moods were the only shadows upon her contented life.

Often he seemed restless and gloomy, and although apparently he never manifested the slightest regret, she feared it in him. His state of mind

## A WOMAN OF UNCERTAIN AGE

---

made her most uncomfortable, as it was almost always accompanied by entreaties to marry him.

"Marry me, my darling," he would plead, "and your position will be secure, and we will be much happier than we are now. We already have one child, and we may have others. I hope so, for I love them and want them more than anything else on earth. Marry me, and I promise I will always love you. Our futures are already joined by loving. Why won't you marry me?"

As usual, the Woman was overcome with emotion. Breaking down, she wept in his arms.

"I cannot; really, I cannot."

Then he would be sorry he had mentioned the subject, as the result was always the same.

A feeling of tenderness and great pity always overpowered him at these times for the Woman, who, he believed, felt no shame or suffering in the life she was living.

The Boy's moods grew more frequent; there seemed to be a want of harmony between them

## A WOMAN OF UNCERTAIN AGE

---

now. A little reasoning might have dispelled all their differences, as no serious misunderstanding was apparent, but the Woman had gradually grown jealous and irritable, and the Boy grew cold and indifferent in turn. Day by day the breach widened between them. For the Woman there was but one thing in life—her love for the Boy. And the fact that he was spending some of his evenings away from home alarmed her, and her old jealousy of the girl, Lady Alice, was aroused.

After weeks of this jealous torture, the Woman was sadly changed. Her face was white and haggard. She had suffered so many sleepless nights that she had resorted to an opiate to induce the sleep she needed. Every time she took it her eyes were filled with tears. She felt that something was wrong, that something tragical was going to happen.

She would fold her soft arms around the Boy's neck and tell him she was only happy when he was near, when she could see him and hear him.

## A WOMAN OF UNCERTAIN AGE

---

"If you would only have faith in me and marry me," he would plead, "then we would go to Portumna Castle, where we would always be happy. You shall do anything you like with the tenants. The whole Clanricade estate, including fifty thousand acres, shall be transformed by you, if you wish."

He told her that according to tradition, Clanricade had always had a hard-hearted, hated landlord. Most of the landlords had surrendered, but he had refused to take back the expelled tenants at any price.

"Therefore, I, too, am branded as the most notorious and hated landlord in Ireland to-day. My name is a symbol of everything that is hateful to the Irish peasants. I have fought, as have all the Clanricades, in every court in Ireland and England, rather than let these rebel tenants go back to their homes. Fifty-one families, all victims of the fight for 'Land Reform,' are now living on the roadside; many of them have been there for twenty years.

## A WOMAN OF UNCERTAIN AGE

---

Where the land is good there are no people. There are miles of beautiful country, but not a village, scarcely a human being. About three miles beyond Woodford is what they call the 'Evicted Village.' It is now simply a cluster of huts by the roadside, with a background of the eternal Connaught Bog."

"Is it true that a whole generation of 'Clanricarde Victims,' as they choose to call themselves, have been reared in these huts?"

"Yes, it is true."

"Oh, my dear, this is horribly cruel, and these huts are so small, that most of the people haven't even a cabbage-patch. It is horrible, but, of course, you are not to blame. It has taken generations to bring about such wretched conditions."

"It is sweet of you to say that."

Kneeling down beside her, he folded her in his arms, and continued pleadingly:

"Marry me, then; and we will go at once to the old castle in County Galway. You shall remodel, rebuild, refurnish everything you like, and together

## A WOMAN OF UNCERTAIN AGE

---

we will build new homes for the tenants and destroy the old ones, and the 'Clanricade Victims' shall no longer be thrown out on the roadside. They shall find a truly human charity in the wife of their hated landlord."

"Tell me," she said, trying to stop his pleading, "was it really true that James Broache and the parish priest built houses and churches on the estate, and your father, in his rage, fought James Broache through three law courts, won the case, and drove the people out again?"

"Yes, it is all quite true, and much more. I remember once seeing a cartoon in the Dublin *Freeman*, which so well illustrated the bitter feeling against my father. The cartoon pictured him being kicked out of Ireland. The man who was doing the kicking was William McDuffie, M.P., of South Galway, who had introduced a bill for his expulsion from Ireland. Parliament wanted the British Government to seize and sell the Clanricade estate, and if the McDuffie bill had passed, the estate would have been put on the market."

## A WOMAN OF UNCERTAIN AGE

---

"Where would the money have gone if it had been sold?"

"To my father, the Earl of Clanricade, of course; but he would have been practically banished from Ireland and prohibited from holding any property there. And wouldn't that have been an extraordinary condemnation for a man whose ancestors were Kings of Connaught, whose forefathers founded the greatest families of Ireland, whose women intermarried with the Kings of Meatha, of Thomomb, of Toghomony, and who gave ancestors to King Edward IV of England? Can't you understand that I am sacrificing all my energies, all my future, in this life I am living with you? We could be so much happier, so much more useful, if we were married. See what a help you could be to me, and if I were your husband you would trust me. This life fits us neither for heaven nor hell."

Instantly her arms were around his neck, imploring him not to say such cruel words. How dare *he*

## A WOMAN OF UNCERTAIN AGE

---

speak of sacrifices? How could he throw in her face the sacrifice *he* had made? What was she doing?—sacrificing herself, her children, everything for him.

"But, my darling, there need be no sacrifice at all, if you would marry me. Why won't you?"

She only covered her face with her hands, saying:

"I love you, but I cannot; I am afraid."

There seemed nothing left for him to do or say, so, with all the passionate tenderness that could come from his loving heart, he soothed her back to cheerfulness. His presence and tender, loving words could do this, but he acknowledged to himself that he felt humiliated and defeated.

## CHAPTER XIX

MRS. LIVINGSTON's marriage with Lord Anthony Berry O'Meara was very soon to take place. Much of the fashionable London world was to be present at the ceremony. It was to be a great triumph in the eyes of their world. Much pomp was being planned, and many American friends were expected.

Mrs. Livingston had always been greatly concerned regarding her niece's mode of living, and had tried in every way to discourage the intimacy with the Earl; but she had always found it a difficult task even to talk on the delicate subject. The Woman always evaded her hints, pretending not to understand them, and hoping she would have the good sense to cease her meddling.

Mrs. Livingston had reasoned that their present life would soon come to an end and, by loving care

## A WOMAN OF UNCERTAIN AGE

---

and attentions, had endeavored to make her niece see her folly. She was beginning to fear, however, that the Woman's life with the Earl was a fixed habit.

As yet society had nothing to seize upon, although it was insisted that Mrs. Stewart would soon marry the Earl of Clanricade; but the real secret was confined to Lord Anthony and herself.

The Woman had positively refused to take any part in the wedding festivities, and, as the guests from home believed she was living in her aunt's house in London and would expect to find her there, Mrs. Livingston was greatly perturbed. They had been successful in hiding her mode of life from London friends, but could it be concealed longer under existing circumstances? If the truth was discovered it would be "a precious morsel," which the world would exhibit and exploit. It was known that the Earl had been spending much of his time away from the villa, and that he had been putting Portumna Castle, the seat of the

## A WOMAN OF UNCERTAIN AGE

---

Clanricades, in excellent condition. All this, combined with the knowledge that the Woman was miserably unhappy, had caused the aunt no little uneasiness. She suspected that the Earl had at last grown tired of her niece, and she feared the consequences.

Lord Anthony was sent as ambassador to find out, if he could, the cause of the Woman's unhappiness and the Boy's neglect. After cautiously leading up to the real object of his visit, Lord Anthony said:

"My boy, I might as well be plain with you; there is something very important I want to talk about."

The Boy's face at once assumed an expression of severity and indifference.

"I suppose the same old subject of Isabelle and my mode of living. Well, let it be brief, Anthony; I don't like to talk to you of her. You know just as well as I do that she brought all this upon herself."

## A WOMAN OF UNCERTAIN AGE

---

Lord Anthony was greatly distressed at these apparently hard words.

"Admitting that she did and that she deserves the humiliation she suffers, the fact remains that she is very unhappy and that your neglect is the cause."

"Then you believe that I am to blame for her unhappiness? I tell you, Anthony, I am not. It is her own wretched jealousy and disbelief in me that makes her so unhappy."

"But she must have some reason. For weeks she has been living in a fever of doubt and anticipation that something was about to happen—and that you are leading a double life."

"Well, what can I do when she won't believe me? I have been honest with her and have wanted to marry her. She will not consent because she has no confidence in me. She considers me too young. I think I have loved her long enough to prove myself a man."

"There seems no means by which she can escape

## A WOMAN OF UNCERTAIN AGE

---

her present position if she won't marry you, but it means life or death to this woman. You don't understand her."

"Yes, I do. I understand that she is always jealous, always finding fault with me. Every time I move out of her sight she thinks I am going to some other woman."

"And isn't she right?"

The Boy shrugged his shoulders, as he replied coldly:

"She has no wish to repair the misery which she has brought upon us."

"That will do. Don't say those things to me. I know all about it. I knew this woman years before you did. I know what a miserable existence she had with her cold, indifferent husband, who starved her soul into loving you because you were so young and handsome and full of life and vigor. I tell you, my boy, no more beautiful woman ever existed. No woman ever had higher or better instincts——"

## A WOMAN OF UNCERTAIN AGE

---

"I am glad to see you appreciate her," he interrupted.

"Did she not become the mother of your child because she loved you? Has she not given up everything for you? Did she not take your child and raise him when she believed you to be a mere plebeian? Ah, my boy, she is the highest and best type of woman."

"Yes, Anthony, I know it, and I shall be very frank with you. I understand that what you say is true. I know you love Isabelle, but that makes little difference to me now. I may have been a little jealous of you in the past, but I shall be very plain with you to-day. The truth is, Anthony, I am tired of this life. Don't think me heartless; give me credit for being a man, at least, and don't minimize the difficulties. All the world, like you, would perhaps condemn me if I forsake this woman; but this life is hell to me. I want a wife; a woman to be the mother of my children; a woman I can love openly before the whole world. I al-

## A WOMAN OF UNCERTAIN AGE

---

ready have two children, yet neither is mine, neither can bear my name. I want a son to inherit my name and titles. Can't you understand what this miserable situation means to a man who knows that the children of the women he adores do not belong to him? Can't you see what a horrible life this is?"

"You have touched the real subject, my boy. I think you said children of the *women* you adore. Does this mean——"

"It means, as I told you before, that I must have a wife, by whom I can have children openly and before the world."

"In other words, then, you mean you are going to marry one or the other of these women."

"Yes."

"And since you have a child by both, it doesn't make much difference to you which one you marry?"

"Oh, yes, it does. I have my preference, of course."

## A WOMAN OF UNCERTAIN AGE

---

"Surely you would not, you *could* not, take little Canning from her? Oh, my boy, that would be utterly heartless."

The Boy made no answer, only bowed his head in serious meditation.

This gave Lord Anthony time to think. He determined to find out the true state of the Boy's heart.

"Well, then, which woman are you going to marry and install in Portumna Castle?"

"I am sorry you asked me this, though I know it is good feeling that prompts you. I don't like talking on this subject with you, but, since we have gone so far, I don't mind telling you I have despaired of Isabelle's ever marrying me. She knows me for what I am, yet she will not listen."

Lord Anthony's heart was filled with sympathy for both the Woman and the young Earl before him.

"You have made every effort—you have tried to make all this clear to her?"

## A WOMAN OF UNCERTAIN AGE

---

"Yes; I have humbled myself to the very dust at her feet, yet she will not consent, and she gives me no sufficient reason for refusing. She only cries and tells me she will raise the children to love and respect me, and that, when she dies, they will be mine. Love and respect me!—they will despise me! Can't you fancy it, Anthony? I love both these children equally, and I want them both."

Lord Anthony's face was full of pain as he paced up and down the room. Finally, he asked:

"Then you have made up your mind to marry Lady Alice? Ah, my boy, it will be a cruel thing to do, and you don't know what this will mean to the Woman. Could ever a woman belong more completely to a man than she does to you?"

"Her suffering is entirely due to her own obstinacy. She would see her children grow up to be ashamed of their father, when I am only too anxious and willing to give them the name that should be rightfully theirs. I tell you, Anthony, I have about exhausted my strength to persuade

## A WOMAN OF UNCERTAIN AGE

---

her that it is best to marry. It is not selfishness on my part, but a sort of honor that compels me to marry. You would not have me bring more illegitimate children into the world?"

The Woman had entered the room unseen, and the truth of these last words struck terror to her heart. Instantly she was awakened from her dream of love to the hard realities of life. It was a cruel thing to hear from his own lips, but she appreciated its truth.

Lord Anthony turned, and seeing the agonizing look on the Woman's face, he left the room.

The Woman looked at her lover for a few seconds without speaking. Her brow contracted, but almost instantly she recovered her calm manner.

"And so, my dear boy, you have poured out your confidence to him, and yet you would not tell me what was troubling your heart and spoiling your life? And you consider me wicked and immoral for this life of love? Is this the punishment I deserve?"

## A WOMAN OF UNCERTAIN AGE

---

He made no reply. His head sank lower into his hands.

The Woman stood in the middle of the room, with a somber, tragic look on her face. After watching him in silence for a few moments, she went over to him, clasped his head impulsively to her bosom, and kissed his curly hair.

"Oh, sweetheart, I know now why you have been so cold and indifferent. I was blinded with love and happiness, but now I understand. . . . It is quite impossible for us to continue our life together."

The Boy was frightened at the tragic tone of her voice. He tried hard to think of something to say, but words failed him.

Turning slowly away, the Woman left the room.

When he felt she had gone, he came to himself.

"Oh, very well, then; I, too, can be indifferent."

Obstinacy was strong in him. He realized that a woman of her passionate nature might despise a man she could subdue. Yet he was conscious of a sense of deep disappointment. . . .

## CHAPTER XX

THE Boy went to his rooms and put on his dinner clothes. She heard him go out and tell his valet that he was dining out. She hurried to the window, where she could watch him. His car was waiting at the steps, with the mechanic snoring in his seat.

"Wake up, you lazy cur!" he roared. "Get out. I am going to drive."

He flung himself into the seat, settling at the steering wheel with the alertness of a born driver; then, jamming on third speed, he opened the exhaust and the car with a rattle and roar bounded on and out of sight.

She listened to the song of the cylinder and coil. It had always been music to her.

"Good-by, sweet boy; I have loved you too much," she said. "The happiest time of my life

## A WOMAN OF UNCERTAIN AGE

---

has been spent beside you in that car, but you have gone—gone and left me alone at this terrible hour, when I need you so much.” Then she was seized with a wild frenzy. “Come back! come back!” she cried. “You must not go like this—you must not. You don’t know what it means to me. And so you are tired of me so soon? Never mind, you shall know how much I love you—no woman will ever love you as I have.”

At that moment a caller was announced. It was Lady Alice. Striving to conceal her agitation, the Woman told the maid to say that she would be down in a few moments.

She caught sight of her face in the mirror. It frightened even her, so tear-stained was it and full of despair.

“Oh, she must not see me looking as if I were an object of pity, and I could not bear her pity.”

She rang for her maid, who assisted her to make a hasty toilette. She felt that she was going to hear her death sentence. Her suspicions and

## A WOMAN OF UNCERTAIN AGE

---

jealousies had been so great on account of this girl. . . . All sorts of contradictory thoughts passed through her mind as she was dressing.

She found that all the toilette-water on her dressing-table could not hide the traces of tears.

"The whole thing is plain," she said to herself. "The face of this girl has taken him from me. I always feared it would be so, but the end has not come."

Her face was burning with wild anger and wounded pride, and her heart beat fast. With a trembling and impatient hand she once more took up the powder-puff.

"She must not see that I have been weeping. I must be brave; I must be a woman before this girl who loves him; but she shall not have the baby, for I saved his life. The doctor would have let him die. I tied the cord with my own hands. By every means I tried to make him live, because I loved him. He is mine now, and I will never give him up. I cannot keep his father—but they shall tear me to pieces before I give up their boy."

## A WOMAN OF UNCERTAIN AGE

---

Taking a picture from the mantel, she pressed it to her lips.

"No, you little darling," she murmured, "they shall never have you. This shall be my revenge."

At that moment Lady Alice came in softly and closed the door after her.

"Pardon me, won't you, for coming up like this? I know it is a most unusual thing to do, but I feared you were not coming down to see me."

The Woman stood erect. Firmly she grasped the picture in her hand. Then slowly she put it back in its place on the mantel. With a keen, comprehensive glance, she looked at Lady Alice, who stood with a troubled expression on her face, yet with something almost approaching adoration and pity for the proud, beautiful woman before her.

There was little resemblance between stately Lady Alice and the girl the Woman had nursed back to life and respectability.

The pride and anger suddenly died out of the Woman's face, and the wish for vengeance van-

## A WOMAN OF UNCERTAIN AGE

---

ished from her heart as she gazed at the girl. 'After all, was not the Boy the first love of her girlhood? Had he not sought her, humiliated her and disgraced her? Was she not the mother of his child? Had she not the first right to him?

Lady Alice approached the Woman timidly, holding out her hand in friendly greeting. The Woman resented the action, and a spasm of pain passed over her face.

With an appealing look, Lady Alice said:

"You have my child; I have come to see him. You won't deny me this favor. I am in great distress. It is most unfortunate that we both love the same man. The Earl is miserable, and you must help him. Can't we be friends? You were so kind to me over there; you saved my life. I know you must have a great and loving heart, and I will forgive you everything—only let me see my child. Let me feel his little arms around my neck. His father has told me how dear he is to you, and how much he loves you for the gracious instinct that you have shown in loving our child."

## A WOMAN OF UNCERTAIN AGE

---

"And he has told you all this, the wretched traitor?"

"Oh, no, not traitor; that is not just."

"Just? How dare you say it? What do you know of a love like mine? I have sacrificed everything for him."

"Yes, I know, and I am sorry for you and I pity you from the bottom of my heart."

"I don't want your miserable pity. I hate you!"

"Your heart has become so hard! Is there nothing I can say to touch you?"

"No, nothing. I hate you because you have taken him from me."

Lady Alice had fallen on her knees and was clinging to the Woman's gown, as she piteously pleaded:

"Oh, but you won't deny me the pleasure of seeing my child? If you heard his baby voice crying to see his mother just once, would you close your ears?"

The Woman promptly trampled all her wounded

## A WOMAN OF UNCERTAIN AGE

---

love and pride under foot, and resolved to act bravely and justly.

"Yes, I know the Earl is unhappy," she said,  
"but what is the cause?"

"Why, don't you know? Has he not told you?"

"He has told me so many things of late—so much seemed to be troubling him."

"But I would rather not tell you. I don't wish to cause you any pain."

"Oh, don't be afraid; I am quite accustomed to suffering, and I will feel much better to hear it from your own lips, although I may already know."

"You know, we are going to be married, that our wedding day is already arranged, and his greatest unhappiness is the thought of taking our boy from you?"

"Oh, is that all?"

"No. . . . He hates to break the tie, but he says that he must before the evil grows greater. Yet he believes you to be the noblest of loving women."

## A WOMAN OF UNCERTAIN AGE

---

"Oh, does he?" she said, with a sarcastic smile on her colorless lips. "Well, go on, go on; I want to hear it all from your own lips. I shall give him up willingly if he wishes it. I love him too well to do anything to make him unhappy."

Lady Alice's heart was beginning to warm to the Woman, whose voice now sounded like sad music. She was beginning to perceive her true nature.

"I was sure you would feel so, because you were so good to me when I was ill."

"Oh, it was not because I was so good, but because I loved him."

The Woman told Lady Alice of the Earl's masquerading in her house, all of which was new to the girl, and it filled her with anger and jealousy.

"And so he left me for you," said Lady Alice, "and he sent you to me to lie to me and steal my baby, thinking he would be rid of me and all responsibility. He would have been glad if I had died, and I wish I had."

## A WOMAN OF UNCERTAIN AGE

---

She broke into tears.

"Calm yourself and try to be reasonable, and I will take you to see your child. But first tell me, when is the wedding to take place?"

"Never! Do you think I would marry him, knowing how he loves you?"

"But you *don't* know. Why do you think he loves me? Tell me." Her voice was appealing now. "Have you quarreled with him?"

"Yes. We have quarreled and parted."

"Calm yourself, and promise me that you will be careful before the nurse."

Without another word, the two women went into the nursery.

After Lady Alice's departure, the Woman told her maid that she did not feel well and was going to bed. Then she went lifelessly back to her room and shut herself in. All that had occurred during the day had thrown her into a nervous state of both mind and body. She felt heartsick, curiously, as though all the magnetism of life had gone.

## A WOMAN OF UNCERTAIN AGE

---

She wandered about the room in a sort of delirious frenzy, collecting her things. Taking all her clothes from the closet, she folded and refolded them. Then she wrapped her shoes in tissue-paper and piled them on the chair beside her. . . .

A flood of happiness swept over her face. Her whole being was irradiated as she drew a baby-hamper up close to the fire. She gazed long and earnestly at the new infant's garments it contained. For an instant her joy was unreasoning and unthinking. For some time she sat in the fire-lit silence, thinking the sweetest thoughts of her heart, of the joy the preparation of these tiny garments had brought her. With her own hands she had fashioned them, embroidered the fine materials, and she had prepared them with such infinite happiness of anticipation. It had been the greatest delight of her approaching motherhood, but they would not be needed now. . . . Then, with a stifled cry, she dropped on the floor beside the hamper, and sighs and tears wrung her heart.

## A WOMAN OF UNCERTAIN AGE

---

Then her thoughts went back to her little child's grave, drenched with rain, the dead grasses and roses lying in sodden masses upon it. She imagined she saw the colored streaks down the white surface of the marble from the deep cutting where the name and age of her little sleeper was engraved. As she arose, the flickering firelight fell upon the baby array before her and she lifted a tiny slip and dried her eyes with it, then touched her lips reverently to it as she sobbed, "Oh, my baby, my baby! But it cannot be. He's ashamed of me because I want you."

A sense of irony woke in her, as she thought what a vital meaning the advent of the child's coming would have meant to her. The maternal instinct was strong in this woman, the simple instinct she had never lost, as many women do by excessive artificial cultivation. She had always been happiest under the influence of the soothing physical sensation of approaching maternity. All her thoughts at once went back to the time when

## A WOMAN OF UNCERTAIN AGE

---

her lover's enthusiastic hopes for a son had been sadly dispelled by the birth of a daughter.

"I promised him a son," she murmured; "yes, but it cannot be now. . . . but the sacrifice seems a crime, almost as hideous as murder." How I would have loved to have been his inspiration all through life, doing the woman's part, steadfast, unselfish; to have walked patiently by his side, quiet, unshaken, always loving him and inspiring him to good deeds and firm resolutions. I know I could have been a great help to him, but he wishes to go on without me. I have exhausted my influence over him, though I am sure that I aroused his best instincts. It makes me weep to think that his so-called conscience is greater than his love for me. Such love is not enough. I must be adored by the being to whom I belong. I was sure I would be unhappy if I followed the inclination of my nature—this cursed nature of mine that would not be subdued. But there can be nothing more between us."

## A WOMAN OF UNCERTAIN AGE

---

She had pulled a trunk out of a closet in the room and was packing. She collected all of the remaining trifles and put them into the tray of the trunk. Then, with a deep sigh of relief, she closed the lid. She felt better to think that she had packed her treasures. Her maid could do the rest in the morning.

Preparing for her bath, she laid a lacey gown out on the bed, then carefully brushed her hair. This woman, whose life was love, desired, even in the shadow of death, to be sweet and attractive. She went regularly to bed and lay quite still for some time, then she rearranged the pillows and tried to make herself more comfortable. Finally, she arose and put on her dressing-gown, from the pocket of which she took a small vial. Shaking out a little white powder into the palm of her hand, she put her tongue to it.

"That is better," she said; "now I will sleep. Only sleep will refresh me and give me the courage to tell him that I am going."

## A WOMAN OF UNCERTAIN AGE

---

Soon she had forgotten everything in a deep sleep. It was after midnight when she awoke. She sat up in bed, dazed and bewildered. All that had occurred came slowly back to her.

"Thank God!" she said; "this awful night will soon be over."

Suddenly her mind was filled with the awful fear of being abandoned—what if he never came back? But her determination to go did not leave her.

"Yes, I am going in the morning," she repeated to herself several times. "I will once more try to forget him—and I will."

At that instant she caught the sound of the soft, muffled pulsation of his machine halting at the steps. She turned quickly to the window and looked out. By the streaks of pale yellow light which were thrown across the drive she saw indistinctly the Boy climbing cautiously out of the car. She breathed more freely now. Her heart leaped with joy at the sound of his voice. He was

## A WOMAN OF UNCERTAIN AGE

---

giving some order to his man. Then she heard him come in and mount the stairs; he seemed noisy and a little uncertain on his feet. She thought he had been indulging too freely in "Mountain Dew."

She listened breathlessly.

"Yes, he is coming to me, and I fear I will forgive him everything if he comes."

She clasped her hands over her heart.

"Yes, he is coming." She thought she heard the lock click. Then, crossing the room, she threw herself on the couch, pretending to be asleep. With half-closed eyelids she watched the door. She felt if she were dying and he would come and bend over her and she could feel his kisses and tears upon her face, she would live. She waited and watched the door, but it did not open. For a few moments she lay confused—a vision of Lady Alice was before her. She was pierced with a pang of envy, and with it came a feeling that it would be more bitter to let this girl even guess at her

## A WOMAN OF UNCERTAIN AGE

---

desolation than to give up the Boy. With this feeling, she grew stronger in her resolution to leave without seeing him again. She got up and seated herself at her desk.

## CHAPTER XXI

THE Boy had come home late that night, feeling tired, sleepy and very stupid. He found a low fire burning in the grate, his gown and slippers toasting before it, as usual, but to-night they were placed here by the hands of his valet. He had been miserable all evening at having left the Woman in such a mood. He felt that he had been a brute, and resolved never to do it again. He sat for some time dreaming and half dozing before the fire. Two feminine types were before him, and he admitted that there had been a time when he had considered marrying the English girl, but to-night the Woman was foremost in his thoughts. The more he saw of life and women, the surer he was that this woman, despite her tempers, this woman, who domineered while she adored him, was the only woman that was really worth while.

## A WOMAN OF UNCERTAIN AGE

---

He made up his mind to marry her, if he had to carry her to the altar in his arms.

Throwing his cigarette into the grate, he got up and made his way to her door. He turned the knob, but the door did not open; it was locked. His pride was wounded by her action. She, who had always been so eager for his caresses—how could she lock him out? Returning to his room, he thought it over and it all seemed extraordinary. If she had been ill, she would have wanted him more than ever. He had loved and respected her every emotion, but this seemed too much. No doubt she had gone to bed in a temper, weary of waiting for him. These tempers were becoming altogether too frequent. They were taking all the sunshine out of their lives. . . . At last he fell asleep in his chair. . . .

The night dragged on. The Woman had written page after page of manuscript. One letter read:

## A WOMAN OF UNCERTAIN AGE

---

"DEAREST: My patience is exhausted. You have broken my heart. I have learned from Lady Alice's own lips that you are preparing to marry her. I know now what has kept you from me so much of late. She came to me this evening and told me everything. How cowardly of you to betray me to her! I have never wanted to know. I was so happy while I believed in you, but my womanly instincts were right, after all. My heart has been too loving, too responsive. Forgive me if I have been too exacting, if I have expected too much of you——"

The Woman threw down her pen, determining not to write, but to speak to him, face to face. She crossed the hall to his room. His door was open and she found him sleeping in his chair. The sight of her sleeping lover was like balm to her wounded heart; she at once felt her jealousies and equally her good resolutions vanishing. She leaned her face against his bare arm and sobbed softly:

## A WOMAN OF UNCERTAIN AGE

---

"Good-by, my sweet boy, I am going while I yet adore you. I dare not trust myself to waken you. If I did, all my good resolutions would go like the wind."

With a long, last look at her sleeping lover, she fled to her room, and seated herself at the desk.

"No, no," she said to herself, "I cannot, I dare not. I must go without seeing him again. My great suffering, my disappointment, must not be known even to him. I must live on in silence. Yet, after all, what would life have been if I had not known him? My every emotion, my every sensation—he has gratified them all. I must have the power to cure myself. Now I will tell him in a few words all I have to say." She wrote:

"MY SWEET BOY: I have just been to your room to say farewell. It is all over between us. I cannot endure the cruel pangs, the terrible anguish of seeing you marry. My soul is sick; I must go. It seems a cowardly, unwomanly thing to

## A WOMAN OF UNCERTAIN AGE

---

write all this and then run away without saying good-by, but I know that even now a smile or a caress from you would bring back all the joy of my life. It would make me well again. It would cure all my sufferings, but only for a little while, and I am going before it is too late. . . .

"Yet if you would only come to me, only touch me or kiss me, it would give me the courage I need. There are only two reasons why I have not married you. The one nearest my heart is the fear of losing the love of my children. I might be able to explain it to my daughter, but never to my son Tommy, who loves you, but who knew you only as his mother's chauffeur. Believe me, dear one, if it had not been for my little son, I think I might have been foolish enough to have married you long ago. He must be my future life.

"The other reason was my fear that I could not keep you for long. Yet I cannot understand how I am going to live without the happiness and—distress you have caused me. I have been too

## A WOMAN OF UNCERTAIN AGE

---

happy. Such great happiness could not last, but my parting from you makes me suffer more than I can ever again endure. I am not complaining: You are not guilty of a single fault. The fault is mine."

k

She threw down her pen, and paced the floor excitedly. Peering out of the window at the slow dawn, she murmured:

"Isn't it strange that I should feel so cold and nervous? I thought my heart would be light; that I would feel a glow of satisfaction at my good resolutions. Oh, but I am so tired and cold! I need sleep and rest. I long for perfect rest, away from all this horrible nightmare of disbelief and jealousy which is eating out my very soul. Loving him has made me happy, but this is killing me. If I could only get a little sleep, it would give me the courage I need so much." Again taking the vial from her pocket, she shook out the whole contents in a small glass.

## A WOMAN OF UNCERTAIN AGE

---

"I think I will take it all and end this torture. Then he will be free and he will know how much I loved him."

The empty vial dropped from her trembling hands. She was suddenly seized with a fear of death.

"No! no! I cannot, I dare not die. It is cowardly to take my own life—it requires more courage to live than to die. I must and will live for my children's sake. It is not too late."

She fell on her knees and prayed fervently, as only a woman who finds herself in the most bitter agony can pray. It was a prayer for strength and for courage to live her life. Rising, she seemed a little soothed, and seating herself again at the desk, she began to write. Suddenly she stopped; her teeth were chattering, her hands trembled violently.

"Oh, why, why do I write him all this? It is all a lie—a lie! Nothing really matters but that he does not love me."

## A WOMAN OF UNCERTAIN AGE

---

She took the robe from the couch and wrapped it around her, then, throwing fresh wood on the dying fire and pulling the desk up close to the grate, she lay back in the chair, putting her feet near the blaze. She was a picture of despair. Burying her face in her hands, she wept softly for a few moments.

With a new determination, she arose and from a small wall-closet took out a decanter of whisky. She poured some of it into the glass containing the opiate and drank it down quickly. Then she seated herself once more at the desk and began to write wildly. This time her words were few and straight from her heart:

"**M**Y **BLESSED** Boy: I have awakened from my foolish dreams and resolutions. I realize my helplessness to live my life without you, because you *are* my life. It may be a depraved condition, but it is the strongest thing in me. Oh, if death had only come to me before I found you no longer

## A WOMAN OF UNCERTAIN AGE

---

loved me! Yes, death must end it all. It seems the only way, but the awful uncertainty of it frightens me."

She half rose, then sank back in her chair. Again and again she tried to rise. After several attempts she succeeded in groping her way to the chiffonier, and with trembling hands she opened the drawer and took out the little old brown cap. Hugging it close to her heart, she staggered back to the chair before the fire.

"I am so cold," she murmured; "but it is not fire that I need—it is you, you my sweet pet—your loving arms around me. I will never dare sleep away from you again." She glanced at the door in a spasm of strange joy. "Yes, yes, I knew he would come. Yes, I will let you in."

She tried to go to the door, but her limbs refused to move. Then her head sank down on her folded arms on the desk. . . .

## A WOMAN OF UNCERTAIN AGE

---

The Boy wakened with a start from his nap in the chair. He had been dreaming of the Woman. He was seized with a strong impulse to go to her room and beg for admission, but his pride was too hurt, the humiliation too great. Just then he caught sight of a letter on the table, and his face clouded as he recognized the writing.

"By Jove! it is from Alice. What does it mean? How did she know I was living here?"

Tearing open the envelope, he read:

"**MY DEAR EARL:** I have just returned from the house where you are living, where I went to see the woman who saved my life. She told me of your escapade in her house. It was for her that you went to America, and not for me. You left me to die when I was scarcely more than a child; you sent her to steal my baby and to lead me to believe it was dead, thinking it would rid you of all responsibilities. My blind faith in you led me

## A WOMAN OF UNCERTAIN AGE

---

to believe that some day you would marry me, but I find you have deceived me from the first.

"I saw you motoring at Henley. The Woman had a small boy hugged close on her lap, and it aroused my curiosity. No one could have seen your face without feeling you were happy. I resolved to revenge myself by making you both miserable. I followed your car to that house, where I saw a nurse, with a baby, on the lawn. I saw the boy close, and I knew he was mine; I felt it down deep in my heart. I bribed the nurse, and I learned, among other things, that you had been away a great deal of late and that the Woman was unhappy. I went to her to demand my child, but my courage failed me. She took me to the nursery and I felt his warm arms around my neck and kissed his soft, baby cheeks. My soul was filled with a longing to possess him. But I have decided to marry Lord Deering and go to India to live. I ask you to keep my secret from the world.

ALICE."

## A WOMAN OF UNCERTAIN AGE

---

Frowning and biting his lips, he stuffed the letter into the pocket of his dressing-gown. So the long-dreaded crisis had come.

"I understand now why the door was locked. Will I ever be able to explain?"

Both women were instantly weighed in his mind, but there was not a suggestion of comparison. He crossed the hall hurriedly to her door and heard her moaning:

"I will never dare sleep away from you again."

He put his ear to the door and listened, but he heard nothing more. He knocked softly.

"Dearest, I want to come in; open the door."

There was no answer. He turned the knob, the door opened, and he saw the empty vial on the desk and the letters. . . . He took it all in at a glance. Lifting her head from the desk, he laid it back on his arm.

"Oh, my love! my love! what have you done? There was not a word of truth in what Alice told you. Speak to me! speak to me! Tell me you

## A WOMAN OF UNCERTAIN AGE

---

love me and trust me. It is all a mistake. There is no one but you. Can't you hear me? You must not go from me like this—you must live for me. We will marry and be happy. You must live, you must stay here in my arms. I have the castle all ready for you; that is what has kept me away from you. My love, my love, say you will marry me! Speak to me!"

He put his head down close to hers; her lips touched his hair.

She answered faintly:

"Yes—sweet boy, I—I—will—I need you—I cannot live my life without you. You won't let me die, will you? I—want to live and be—your wife and the mother of your heir."

Her head dropped back, her eyelids closed—forever.

Thus did the eccentricities of the Woman's tragical life meet an end.

He lifted her and carried her in his arms to the bed, laying her head on the very pillow upon which

## A WOMAN OF UNCERTAIN AGE

---

she had tried to sleep. Ah, but now she would sleep—sleep on, forever—with no more vague dreams of love and passion, no more horrible jealousy and disappointment.

In this mournful and solemn picture we see an example—a lesson of real life of what so wild a love and savage a passion can do.

She had found in the Boy an ardent lover, a man of vigorous masculinity, the realization of all her years of dreams, and she had been happy, but it was for only a little while. Was not the comfortable, peaceful companionship best after all? Ah, but one cannot be comfortable unless one is normal. . . .

Great drops of sweat oozed from the Boy's face, his teeth chattered, an icy chill crept through him; yet he gave no alarm, but just stayed quietly hovering over her. Then bending down, he unfastened her lacy gown to the last button at her waist, revealing to him her firm, still warm flesh turning softly in pregnancy. As the time of her accouche-

## A WOMAN OF UNCERTAIN AGE

---

ment had approached, he had cherished her more and more. With this new bond of flesh he had believed their future peace and life would have been established forever. The idea of having her safely married to him and installed in Portumna Castle had made him happy. He had wanted nothing but her. The castle was being renovated. He had spent much to have it done as he fancied she would like it. One of the many little surprises for her had been the placing of a swinging bassinette in her room, beside her bed. It was lined and curtained with pale pink silk with over-draperies of exquisitely embroidered mull, with tiny pillows and a tufted cover with O. S. embroidered on it. He had looked after this layette, ordering everything he thought her exquisite taste would approve of. But, alas! these happy preparations which had been so absorbing, so delightful to him, that had stimulated all the tenderness of his father-love, had been the undoing of his happiness. He recalled his sin with all the poignancy of grief.

## A WOMAN OF UNCERTAIN AGE

---

Taking up her hand, now hideous in death, the hand once so sweet that had delighted in voluptuous caressing, he clasped it in both his own for a moment; then trembling hysterically, he put it down at her side. Buttoning up her gown again, he endeavored to pull it down over the tips of her toes. It sank in at her breast, then rose at her abdomen, falling again at her knees and feet.

In a frenzy of weeping, choked by sobs that shook his whole frame, he laid his face on her breast for a moment, then pressing the fullest kiss of love he had ever given, he moaned: "Sweet mother of my child, ah! why, why did you leave me? . . . ."

## CHAPTER XXII

THE Woman's body had been removed to her aunt's house in Grosvenor Square. Mrs. Livingston and Lord Anthony had invented some lie to try and hide the real cause of the Woman's death.

The priest was there. On the table at the Woman's head was a large crucifix between two burning candles. All day and night the Boy had watched by her side. As she lay before him all garlanded with flowers which filled the room with stifling perfume, there seemed no future existence for him. The rest of the world was lost. There was no place in life for him. He felt as if non-existent. He confused the unhappy sight before him with sweet memories of her sighs, her long embraces, her hot tears of love and tempers. This woman of love had been like a delicate plant that

## A WOMAN OF UNCERTAIN AGE

---

needed only the warmth of love to keep her blooming. She had glorified sin for love, and her proud spirit, fearing abandonment, had sought death to escape it.

As he gazed at her, her sealed lips still smiling up at him out of the peace into which she had entered, he felt an insufficiency of life. Then she appeared to him as a languishing vision. Her bier was transformed into a golden barge with sails of violets, lace and ribbons, that exhaled the delicate perfume of her living self. Languorous music mingled with her sweet, caressing voice of love—breathed forth appealing strains of invitation to follow her. . . .

The priest took him firmly by the arm, and half dragged, half led him from the room. After a considerable discourse on his earthly doings, the father tried in the gentlest manner to make him see it was better for him to leave the house before the Woman's children should come. He collapsed at this request. At first he felt he could not go; he

## A WOMAN OF UNCERTAIN AGE

---

must stay. He meant to follow her to the grave, then throw himself upon it and die. But as he reflected, it seemed the most delicate and decent thing to do, so he promised to go after he had seen her once more. Later he slipped into the room. It was for the last time. The watchers had fallen asleep. He had gone to say farewell to the Woman, who had loved him so well, and who had given up everything for him. He suffered only in his love. He felt his very soul passing from him, just as a dying man feels his life ebbing from a bleeding wound. One fit of desperation followed another and another; then with trembling fingers he lifted, for the last time, the cover from her face. He closed his eyes as he did so, fearing lest he should see her features discolored or sunken. Then he pressed one long last kiss on her forehead and hair as he sobbed: "My love, my dear one, farewell, forever . . ."

A voice at his side startled him. A small, soft hand passed slowly over his hair. He felt a warm

## A WOMAN OF UNCERTAIN AGE

---

breath on his neck, but the sweetness of the sensation only deepened his sadness. He felt his whole being dissolving in despair. What was it? What was in this voice and touch that made his soul collapse into shame? For an instant it was as if some supernatural power had destroyed his strength. Then quickly recovering himself, he fled from the room and from the house, never to return—feeling it a pity he had not gone before.

After the burial he sought solitude away from everybody; even the sight of his own children distressed him. His boy, Canning, was always asking when she was coming home, and the baby cried for her. This nearly broke his heart. Weeks and months passed, but time did not allay his torture. He seemed to live beside the world, but not in it.

The strangest fear seemed suddenly to have taken possession of him. Though he thought of her continuously, slowly but steadily he believed he was forgetting her. He was desperate when he felt her image fading from his memory. Her lov-

## A WOMAN OF UNCERTAIN AGE

---

ing him had been the sweetest thing in his life, and he could not bear to lose the sweet influence which, he felt, was reaching out to him from beyond her grave. He seemed suffocated like a youth beneath the love impulses that filled his aching heart. Life seemed intolerable; he resolved to end it on her grave.

He had tried hard to bring himself to some feeling of religion, to throw himself into the happy future life in which he would see her again; but these thoughts would not come. He seemed to have lost everything. When he thought of her there in the earth all alone, he was seized with a fierce, gloomy, despairing rage. He went to the cemetery, but he found someone there before him.  
. . . It was the Woman's two children. Both were on their knees, weeping, beside her grave. At this sight his great loving heart, rent by sobs, pulsated in the shadow beneath the load of his fathomless regrets.

It was the crucial moment.

## A WOMAN OF UNCERTAIN AGE

---

The gate creaked as he retreated hurriedly through it. The next instant little Tommy had him by the coat, pleading: "Oh, Canning, dear Canning, don't run away; come and kneel down and cry, too. I know you want to . . ." The Boy made a desperate effort, with an appealing look and gestures, to stop the child, but he only continued, unheeding. "Oh, don't mind Belle; she knows. I told her; but I didn't tell her," he said, apologetically, "until after I saw you hiding behind the pine trees when they were bearing mother. I felt awfully sorry for you that day, Canning, and I tried to go over and get you; but Aunt Livingston held my hand so tight and wouldn't let me go. . . ."

The Boy could not speak. He knelt and took the child in his arms. Vague, incoherent sobs broke from his parched throat.

The voluptuousness of grief was complete. He had found someone to share it with him.





# AFTER THE PARDON

## A NOVEL

By MATILDE SERAO

---

THE finding of a new presentation of a phase of human passions is a delight rarely encountered. In this romance of hearts, righteous jealousy and satiated passions combine to bring about an extraordinary marital situation. And then, again jealousy is responsible for both disaster and happiness.

Creatures made of miserable clay could not comprehend the sublimity of the love which sways the Latins and bends them to its desires. Warm blood flows in their veins. In them the emotional nature and the finer intelligence are ever at variance. Always there is the struggle and mainly the emotional is predominant. Their passions force them beyond all laws and duties, beyond all vows.

---

12mo, Cloth. Price, \$1.50

# THE WOMAN HERSELF

## A ROMANCE

---

THE heart story of a woman whose rare temperament, wrought of finest fibre, vibrates at the lightest touch of the most delicate sentiment, yet whose soul pours forth the rich strains of the tenderest intense passion. In her, love takes precedence over convention and law with a joyousness undimmed by a consciousness of wrong to herself, yet not without commiseration for those who suffer for her happiness. She believes that she is introspective, but she looks only into her heart. She has the emotional capacity of a great artiste, and with it the moral irresponsibility. So potent is the love draft she drinks into her heart that it infects the pages of the book with a subtle insidious mental intoxicant.

The author's grace of expression compels us to condone the perjured purity of her heroine's life.

---

12mo, Cloth. Price, \$1.25

# THE ISLE OF TEMPTATION

## A NOVEL

By ARTHUR STANLEY  
COLLETON

---

**I**N the Isle of Temptation, we offer a novel of the intensest *dramatic* quality, a novel magnificently aglow with life. The author is an unflinching realist, but one who has known how to invest his unparalleled fearlessness and truthfulness with dignity, with sincerity, with sombre beauty.

It is the story of a youth who came to New York, "that terrible enchantress;"—whom the city took into her magical embrace and fed with the subtle honey of her poisonous blooms.

The author is especially powerful in his delineation of female characters. We do not hesitate to say that Kate Bathurst, Lucy Treat and Clara Earle are women worthy of Balzac—relentlessly and powerfully presented.

---

12mo, Cloth. Price, \$1.50

# THE WOMAN, THE MAN AND THE MONSTER

A ROMANCE

By CARLETON DAW

---

THE plot of this novel is surprisingly unique. Some of the situations are so startling as fairly to take away the breath. The opening scene discloses a woman, stripped of clothing, bound to a tree. There are such dramatic denouements as to make the intrigue which is the main thread of the story interesting to an intense degree. The beauty of the heroine, her delightful mentality, her quickness of wit and perception, are all charming features of the story. And there are romantic hillside love scenes, with kisses colored by the sunset, and the daintiest of wooings and cooings with always a mystery and a fearsome shadow in the background.

---

12mo, Cloth. Price, \$1.50











